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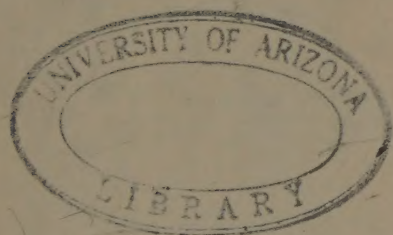
THE ROMANCISTS

OCTAVE FEUILLET

MONSIEUR DE CAMORS











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*MONSIEUR DE CAMORS*

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OCTAVE FEUILLET  
OF THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE

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THIS EDITION OF  
**MONSIEUR DE CAMORS**

HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY

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**STANISLAS REJCHAN**

181719





MONSIEUR DE CAMORS





## PREFACE

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*Confidential communications particularly worthy of credit have been our guide in this narrative. That portion of the public which has recently taken a passionate interest in the mystery of a brilliant Parisian existence may therefore peruse these pages with confidence: they will find therein the exact truth as to the character and destiny of a man who seems to us to be one of the most characteristic figures of his time and his country—Comte Louis Lange d'Ardennes de Camors.*

*To say of a knave that he was born a knave, of a frail woman that she was born a courtesan, is a vain and lamentable observation which we hear every day and read everywhere. That trite expression has the inconvenient quality of overturning incidentally some moral ideas still accredited by the common herd. If man is responsible for his acts only to the police, well and good; but, so long as mankind does not subscribe to that belief, as elevating as it is salutary, we must try to persuade ourselves and to persuade others that there are no fatalities of birth. That is, to say the least, encouraging to fathers who take pains with the education of their children, and to well-meaning*

*people who devote themselves to the education of the masses. For our own part, we believe that the hero of this book was born to be an honest man, or the opposite, or something between the two, according to the direction which his natural instructors should give to his inclinations and his faculties, according to the moral surroundings, whose influence he should be required to undergo, and lastly, according to the use he himself should make of his intelligent free-will.*

*OCTAVE FEUILLET.*

PART FIRST



# MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

## PART FIRST

### I

About eleven o'clock on a certain evening in the month of May, a man of some fifty years, of commanding presence and haughty bearing, alighted from a coupé in the courtyard of a small mansion on Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. He ascended the steps with the air of a master. Two or three servants awaited him in the vestibule. One of them followed him into a large study on the first floor, which was connected with a bedroom by an arched opening with a portière. The servant relighted the lamps in the two rooms and was about to withdraw when his master said :

“ My son has not yet come in? ”

“ No, Monsieur le Comte—Monsieur le Comte is not ill? ”

“ Ill? why? ”

“ Monsieur le Comte is pale.”



"I was a little cold this evening at the lake."

"Monsieur le Comte wishes nothing?"

"Nothing."

The servant left the room.

The count, being left alone, walked to a piece of furniture curiously carved in the Italian style, and took from it a long, flat ebony box. It contained two pistols, which he loaded with great care. He then adjusted the caps, which he pressed down with his thumb upon the nipples. That done, he consulted his watch, lighted a cigar, and for half an hour the regular beat of his footsteps resounded dully on the carpet of the study. His cigar smoked-out, he stopped, seemed to reflect, and entered the next room, carrying his weapons. That room, like the other, was furnished with chaste elegance and decorated with taste: a few pictures, all by the best masters, marbles, bronzes and ivories. The count cast a glance of peculiar interest about the interior of that room, which was his own; his eyes rested on the familiar objects, the dark hangings, the bed prepared for sleep; then, walking toward a table which stood in a window-recess, he placed his pistols upon it, sat down, meditated a few moments with his head in his hands, and wrote what follows:

#### TO MY SON

My son, life bores me; I am done with it. The real superiority of man over the inert or passive creatures

that surround him, consists in the ability to free himself at his will from the fatal slavery that is called the laws of nature. Man need not grow old, if he does not choose to do so : the lion has no choice. Consider this text well, for the whole secret of human strength is contained therein.

“ Science has this to say and proves it. Intelligent and free man is an animal whose coming was not foreseen on this planet. The result of a series of unexpected combinations and transformations, he suddenly appears amid the humble submissiveness of inert things like a discordant note, a rebel. Nature begat him without conceiving him. She was like a turkey that has unwittingly hatched an eagle’s egg ; alarmed at the appearance of the monstrosity, she attempted to chain him down : she overburdened him with instincts of which he has made duties, with police regulations of which he has made religions. The shattering of each of those fetters, the crushing of each of those servitudes marks a step in the emancipation of mankind.

“ I would have you know that I die in the faith of the time in which I live. I believe in uncreated, fruitful, all-powerful, everlasting matter. That is the Nature of the ancients. There have been in all times wise men who have caught glimpses of the truth. Fully matured to-day, it falls within the scope of all men : it belongs to all those who have the frame to bear it, for this last religion of mankind is the bread of the strong. It has its

melancholy side, it tends to isolate man ; but it has its grandeur, too, for it makes him free, it makes him a god. It leaves him no duties except toward himself ; it opens a superb field to men of brain and of courage.

“The common herd still is and will always remain under the yoke of its dead religions, under the tyranny of instincts. We shall always see more or less of what you see in Paris at this moment : a society whose brain is atheistic and its heart religious. In reality it no more believes in Christ than in Jupiter, but it continues mechanically to build churches. It is no longer even deistic : it persistently forces back into the recesses of its mind the old chimera of a personal and moral God, witness, arbiter and judge ; but it does not say a word, it does not write a line, it does not make a motion in its public or private life that is not an affirmation of that chimera. That is useful perhaps, but it is contemptible. Take leave of that flock, reflect, and write your own catechism on a clean page.

“For my own part, I made a failure of my life by being born a few years too soon. Heaven and earth were then heaped up with ruins. It was impossible to see. Science, too, was in its infancy, comparatively speaking. Furthermore, I had the prejudices and distaste natural to my name for the doctrines of the new world. I did not realize that there was something better to do than to sulk like a naughty child at one’s conqueror, namely, to confess that his weapons were powerful ones, to take

them from him and crush him with them. In a word, for lack of a principle of action I tossed about at random ; my life was governed by no system. I have been simply a man of pleasure and that is not enough. You will make more of your life if you follow my advice.

“What can a man make of himself in these days, if he has common sense and the spirit to make his life conform to his faith? I put the question, it is for you to solve it ; I can only set before you hastily a few ideas which I think judicious, and which you must work out at your leisure. Materialism is a degrading doctrine for none but fools or the weak ; to be sure, I do not read in its code any of the commonplace moral precepts, of what our fathers called virtue : but I do read there one grand word, which will supply the lack of many others—honor, that is to say, self-respect. It is clear that a materialist cannot be a saint ; but he can be a gentleman, that is something. You have precious gifts, my son ; I know of but one duty that it is incumbent on you to fulfil, to develop them freely and to enjoy them to the utmost. Use women without scruple for pleasure, men for power ; but do nothing low.

“In order that ennui may not drive you, as it drives me, prematurely from the world as soon as the season of pleasure is closed, save for your mature years the emotions of ambition and public life. Do not involve yourself with the reigning government ; it is reserved for you to hear its praises sung by those who will have over-

thrown it. That is the French fashion. Each generation demands its victim. You will soon feel the pressure of the new generation. Prepare from afar to lead it.

"In politics, my son, you must be aware that everyone's principles are governed by his temperament. The bilious are demagogues, the full-blooded are democrats, and the nervous are aristocrats. You are both full-blooded and nervous. That is a most excellent constitution. It allows you to choose. You can, for example, be an aristocrat in your own individual interest and a democrat in the interest of others. You will not be the only one.

"Make yourself master of all questions that are likely to arouse the passions of your contemporaries; but do not allow your own passions to be aroused over any one of them. In reality all principles are a matter of indifference; they are all true or false, according to the hour. Ideas are instruments which you must learn to play upon opportunely in order to dominate men. In that direction, too, you will have comrades.

"Understand, my son, that when you have reached my age and are tired of everything, you will feel the need of powerful sensations. The bloody game of revolution will seem to you then like a love affair at twenty.

"I am tired, my son. I will sum up what I have to say.—To be loved by women, to be feared by men, to be as impassive as a god in face of the tears of the first and the blood of the second, to end in a tempest—that is

the destiny which I have missed, and which I bequeath to you : you are quite capable, with your eminent faculties, of fulfilling it in every particular, if you rid yourself of a sort of faint-heartedness which I have noticed in you, and which you derive, no doubt, from your mother's milk.—So long as man is born of woman, there will be something defective in him.

“To conclude, I say again : shake off all the fetters imposed by nature, instincts, affections, sympathies ; so many shackles on your liberty and your strength.

“Do not marry unless some weighty interest impels you to do so.

“If you marry, do not have children.

“Have no friends ; Cæsar in his old age had a friend, one Brutus.

“The contempt of mankind is the beginning of wisdom.

“Change your style of fencing, it is too bold.

“Do not lose your temper.—Laugh little.—Never weep.—Adieu.

“CAMORS.”

The first feeble rays of dawn crept through the slats of the Venetian blinds. An early bird began to sing in a chestnut tree near the window. Monsieur de Camors raised his head and listened with a distraught air to the sound, which seemed to surprise him. Seeing that day was breaking, he hastily folded the pages he had

written, affixed his seal to the envelope, wrote the superscription : *For Comte Louis de Camors*,—and rose.

Being a great lover of works of art, Monsieur de Camors religiously preserved a superb ivory carving of the 16th century, which had belonged to his wife : it was a Christ, and the dead whiteness of the ivory stood out against a background of velvet. His eye fell upon the pale, sad figure : he let it remain there a moment with strange persistency ; then, smiling bitterly, he grasped one of the pistols with a firm hand, and put it to his temple : there was a loud report ; the fall of a heavy body shook the floor ; fragments of brain were scattered over the rug.—Monsieur de Camors had entered into eternity, his testament in his hand.

To whom was that document addressed ? Upon what soil was that seed to fall ?

Louis de Camors was at that time twenty-seven years old. His mother had died young. It did not appear that she had been particularly happy with her husband. Her son barely remembered her as a pretty, pale-faced young woman who sang softly to put him to sleep, and who often wept. He had been brought up for the most part by a mistress of his father. Her name was Vicomtesse d'Oilly ; she was a widow and not a bad sort of woman. Her natural good sense and the moral laxity which then reigned in Paris allowed her to devote her attention to the father's happiness and the son's education at the same time. When the father escaped her,



which happened before long, he left her the child, hoping to appease her somewhat by that mark of confidence and friendship. He was taken to her three times a week. She dressed him, curled his hair, petted him and took him to mass with her. She also gave him for a playmate a good-looking young Spaniard, who had acted for some time as her secretary. She neglected no opportunity to inculcate sound moral precepts. So it happened one morning that the child, observing, not without surprise, that she deposited a kiss upon her secretary's brow, asked with the curt frankness of his years: "Why do you kiss monsieur, who isn't your husband?"

"My dear," the viscountess replied, "because the good Lord commands us to be charitable and affectionate to the poor, the infirm and the exiled. Monsieur Perez is an exile."

Louis de Camors deserved a better bringing up; he was a child of generous instincts. His schoolmates at Louis-le-Grand College remember his warm-heartedness and his natural charm of manner, which made them forgive his superior abilities and his triumphs during the week, his patent leather boots and his lilac gloves on Sundays. Toward the end of his course he became particularly intimate with a poor student named Lescande, who excelled in mathematics, but was an awkward, shambling creature, shy as a savage, and absurdly sensitive under his dense envelope. He was familiarly called *Tête-de-Loup*, in allusion to his bushy, unruly hair. The dandi-

fied Camors imposed silence on the mockers by covering the excellent youth with the mantle of his friendship. Lescande was grateful to him beyond words, and worshipped him. He threw back the triple bolts of his warm heart for his friend and allowed a momentous secret to come forth. He was in love. He loved a fair-haired maiden, his cousin, who was poor like himself. Indeed, it was a providential circumstance that she was poor : otherwise he would not have dared to raise his thoughts to her. A melancholy event had brought them together : she had lost her father, who was chief of a division in the ministry, and she was left with her mother in straitened circumstances. Lescande, on his last visit, had surprised her with soiled ruffles. Shortly after, he received the following note from her :

“DEAR COUSIN,

“Please excuse my ruffles, which were none too white. I must tell you that mamma and I can only change our ruffles three times a week now. As far as mamma is concerned, no one would ever notice it, for she is as neat as a bird ; so am I ; but when I am practising on the piano, my ruffles rub against the keys. After this explanation, my dear Théodore, I hope you will love me just the same.

“JULIETTE.”

Lescande had wept over it. Luckily he had a plan of his own : he would be an architect. Juliette had prom-

ised to wait for him ; in ten years, he would either have worked himself to death or he would be living in comfort with his cousin in a little cottage of which he showed the plan, several plans indeed, to Camors.

"That is the only ambition I have or can have," he would add. "It's different with you ; you were born for great things."

"Look you, my old Lescande," Camors would reply, having just passed triumphantly through his lesson in rhetoric, "I don't know whether my destiny will be commonplace, but I know that my soul is not. I am conscious of ardent impulses which sometimes cause me inexpressible delight, sometimes inexpressible suffering. I would like to discover a world, save a nation, love a queen ! I have no conception of any but illustrious ambitions and passions. Of the latter, however, I hardly think at all. My energy demands a nobler incentive. I propose to devote myself to one of the great social, political or religious causes which are agitating the world in these days. What cause will it be ? I do not as yet know. I have not as yet any decided opinions ; but as soon as I have left college I shall seek for the truth and I shall readily discover it. I will read all the newspapers. Paris is, as you know, an intellectual centre of such brilliancy that it must give sufficient light to enable one, with the aid of good faith and independence, to find the true road. I am excellently situated for the quest. Although of noble birth, I have no prejudices.

My father leaves me free ; he is himself very enlightened and very liberal. I have a republican uncle, I have a legitimist aunt, who is a saint in addition ; I have a conservative uncle ! I am not inclined to boast of him ; but I tell you simply to show you that having a foot in all parties, I am advantageously situated to compare them with one another and choose between them. Once master of the blessed truth, my old Lescande, you can depend upon it that I will serve it with my pen, my voice and my sword until I die."

Such speeches, uttered with sincere emotion and accompanied by warm handclasps, drew tears from old Lescande called *Tête-de-Loup*.

Eight or nine years later, Louis de Camors rode away one morning from the little house where he was then living with his father. Nothing is so gay as Paris in the morning. Morning is the golden age of the day all the world over. At that delightful hour the world seems peopled entirely with excellent people who love one another. Even Paris, which does not plume itself upon its innocence, takes on under that cheering influence an air of innocent joviality and hearty affability. Little wagons with bells pass one another swiftly in the streets and make one think of dew-covered fields. The rhythmical street-cries of old Paris pierce with their shrill notes the deep humming of the great awakening city. Good-humored concierges sweep the white sidewalks ; half-dressed shopkeepers noisily take down their shut-

ters ; groups of grooms in Scotch caps smoke and fraternize in the gateways of fine houses : you hear neighborly questions, and trivial remarks suited to the rising hour, forecasts of the weather sympathetically exchanged from door to door. Tardy young milliners walk swiftly cityward, stop suddenly for a moment here and there in front of some open shop and resume their flight like flies who have just put their noses to a flower. Even the dead, in that cheerful Paris of the early morning, seem to go gayly to the cemetery with their jaunty coachmen, who smile at each other as they pass.

Supremely indifferent to such pleasant impressions, Louis de Camors, slightly pale, with his eyes half closed and a cigar between his teeth, rode at a footpace along Rue de Bourgogne. He urged his horse to a gallop on the Champs-Élysées, reached the Bois de Boulogne and rode about there at random. Chance willed that he should leave the park by Avenue Maillot, which was not then so thickly settled as it is to-day. There were, however, a few attractive little houses, with green lawns in front, peering out from thickets of lilac and clematis. In front of the open gate of one of these cottages a man was trundling a hoop with a fair-haired child. The man's age was uncertain ; he might be anywhere from twenty-five to forty. He wore a white cravat, early as it was ; dense whiskers, close-cropped like the box at Versailles, formed two isosceles triangles on his cheeks. Camors, if he noticed him, did not seem to pay the

slightest attention to him. And yet it was old Lescande. To be sure they had lost sight of each other for several years, as often happens to the warmest college friends. Lescande, however, whose memory was apparently more faithful, felt his heart leap at sight of the majestic young horseman who was approaching him. He started as if to rush toward him; a broad smile overspread his kindly face and ended in a vague grimace; he was evidently forgotten or not recognized. Camors was within two yards of him, he was passing him, and his handsome face did not betray the least trace of emotion;—suddenly, without moving a single feature, he stopped his horse, took his cigar from his mouth, and remarked tranquilly:

“Aha! so you haven’t your wolf’s head—*tête de loup*—any longer?”

“You recognize me!” cried Lescande.

“*Parbleu!* why not?”

“I thought—I was afraid—on account of my whiskers—”

“Your whiskers don’t change you—they’re becoming to your style of beauty. What are you doing here?”

“Here? Why, I am at home, my friend—Come in a few minutes, I beg you.”

“Why not?” said Camors, in the same tone of absolute indifference.

He gave his horse to the servant who followed him and walked through the garden gate, supported, led forward, caressed by Lescande’s trembling hands.



The garden was of moderate size, but very carefully tended and full of rare shrubs with huge leaves. At the end a small villa in the Italian style presented its graceful façade.

"Really, this is very pretty!" said Camors.

"You recognize my plan number three, don't you?"

"Number three—precisely. And is your cousin within?"

"She is there, my friend," said Lescande in an undertone, pointing to a large window with a balcony, above the front door of the villa; the blinds at the window were closed. "She is there, and this is our son."

Camors let his hand wander over the child's head.

"The devil! you have lost no time. So you are happy, are you, my boy?"

"So happy, my friend, that it makes me uneasy. The good Lord is too good to me, on my word. To be sure, I have worked hard. Just fancy that I passed two years in Spain, among the mountains, an infernal country. I built a fairylike palace for the Marquis de Buena-Vista, a very great nobleman. He saw my plan at the Exposition and lost his head over it. That was the beginning of my fortune. However, I didn't grow rich so fast by my profession alone, you understand—but I met with a succession of incredibly lucky accidents.— I made a handsome profit on some real estate investments, honestly too, I beg you to believe.— I'm not a millionaire, however. As you know, I had nothing and my wife had no

more. However, after building my house I have about ten thousand francs a year. That is hardly enough to enable us to live like this, but I am at work all the time—and I have such courage, my dear fellow! my poor Juliette is so comfortable in this little paradise!”

“She doesn’t wear dirty ruffles now, I fancy?” said Camors.

“I promise you she doesn’t! Indeed, she has a slight leaning toward luxurious living, like all women, you know. But it pleases me to have you remember our schoolboy follies. For my part, in all my going and coming I have never forgotten you for one instant. Indeed I had a wild longing to invite you to my wedding; but, faith, I didn’t dare; you are so magnificent, so grand—with your horses! My wife knows all about you, I tell you! In the first place, I have spoken to her about you a hundred thousand times—and then she adores the races—she’s a subscriber to *Sport*. She says to me: ‘One of your friend’s horses has won again.’ And the whole family rejoices over your glory, my friend!”

A slight flush invaded Camors’s cheeks.

“Really you are too kind,” he said.

They walked a few steps in silence along the fine gravel path that skirted the lawn.

“About yourself, my friend?” said Lescande, “I hope you are happy too?”

“I?” rejoined Camors. “Wonderfully so! My happiness is simple but cloudless. I generally get up in

the morning, I go to the Bois, then to the club, then to the Bois again and then return to the club. If there's a first performance at any theatre, I fly to that. Last night for instance they gave a new play which is really delightful. There's a song in it that begins :

“ ‘It was a woodpecker,  
A little woodpecker,  
A young woodpecker—’

In the refrain they imitate the woodpecker's note. Why, it's fascinating. All Paris will sing it for a year with keen enjoyment. I shall do as all Paris does and I shall be happy.”

“Bless my soul, my friend,” said Lescande gayly, “if that's all you need to make you happy—”

“That and the principles of '89,” said Camors, lighting a fresh cigar with the remains of the first.

Their dialogue was interrupted by a fresh, woman's voice from behind the blinds of the balcony.

“Are you there, Théodore ?”

Camors looked up and saw a very white hand protruding between the slats of the closed blind and bathed in sunlight.

“It's my wife,” said Lescande hastily ; “hide there.”

He pushed him behind a clump of catalpas and assumed a playfully mischievous air as he turned toward the balcony and replied :

“Yes, my dear ; what is it ?”

"Is Maxime with you?"

"Yes, here he is."

"Good-morning, mamma," cried the child.

"Is it fine this morning?" the voice continued.

"Beautiful. Are you all right?"

"I don't know. I slept too heavily, I think."

She drew up the blinds, threw back the shutters and, shading her dazzled eyes with one hand, appeared on the balcony. She was a woman in the flower of her youth, slender, willowy and graceful, and seemed taller than she really was in the ample folds of her blue morning gown. Ribbons of the same shade were entwined in the Grecian fashion in her chestnut hair, which nature, art and the pillow had vied with one another in arranging on her small, well-shaped head. She leaned on the balcony rail and yawned, showing all her white teeth.

"Why do you look so sheepish?" she said, glancing at her husband.

Suddenly she spied Camors, whom his interest in the scene had partly enticed from his shelter: she gave a little frightened cry, hurriedly gathered up her skirts and ran into the room.

From his college days up to that moment, Louis de Camors had never had a very flattering idea of the Juliet who had old Lescande for a Romeo. He was conscious therefore of a feeling of pleased surprise when he saw that his friend had been more fortunate in that respect than he had imagined.

"I am in for a scolding, my friend," said Lescande, laughing with all his heart, "and so are you—for you will stay and breakfast with us, won't you?"

Camors seemed to hesitate, then answered abruptly:

"No, no, my good fellow, it's impossible. I forgot—I have an engagement."

He attempted to go, but Lescande detained him until he had extorted a promise to dine with him *en famille* on the following Tuesday, that is to say, with himself, his wife and his mother-in-law, Madame Mursois.

That invitation left a cloud upon Camors's mind until the appointed day. Not only was he not fond of family dinners, but he thought of the little scene on the balcony much oftener than he liked. Lescande's talkative good-nature annoyed and touched him at the same time. He felt that he was called upon to play a ridiculous part in the presence of that pretty creature in whom he foresaw a flirt, and whom his boyhood memories and the laws of honor made sacred to him. So that he was in a far from pleasant mood when he alighted from his dog-cart on the Tuesday evening in front of the little villa on Avenue Maillot.

His welcome at the hands of Madame Lescande and her mother restored his courage to some extent. They seemed to him what they really were, two very excellent ladies with abundant ease and distinction of manner. The mother had been beautiful; she was widowed early in life; there was not a blemish on her good name. A sort

of exquisite refinement took the place of substantial principles, which are hardly consistent with the age we live in. Like many women in society she had a taste for virtue, as the ermine has a taste for being white. Vice was repugnant to her, less as being wrong than as a disfigurement. Her daughter had received from her the instinct of chastity which is concealed more frequently than is commonly supposed beneath the frivolous exterior of worldly women.

These two excellent women had, however, one source of vexation in common with many Parisian women of their time and their station. Despite their good sense they gazed in open-mouthed bourgeois admiration at the aristocracy, more or less pure, which they saw on exhibition on the Champs-Élysées, in the theatres, at the race-tracks, at the fashionable watering-places; they envied its industrious frivolity, its rival vanities; despite their virtuous lives they showed scandalous curiosity concerning the most equivocal adventures that ever came to light in that select circle. It was their delight and their glory to have at their tongue's end the most trivial details of life in the most exalted Parisian spheres, to keep track of the festivities, to talk the slang, to copy the toilets and distinguish the liveries from one another. So that, even if they were not the rose, they lived near it, they saturated themselves with its perfume and its colors, and such familiarity with the ways of the great raised them greatly in their own and their friends' esteem.



Camors, although he did not as yet occupy the position in the Olympus of fashion that he was destined to occupy some day, might already be looked upon as a demi-god, and for that reason he inspired the keenest curiosity in Madame Lescande and her mother. His former intimacy with Lescande, moreover, had caused them to take a special interest in him. They knew the names of his horses; perhaps they knew the names of his mistresses. It required all their natural good taste to conceal from their guest the secret agitation of their nerves in his sanctified presence. They succeeded so well, however, that Camors was piqued by it. Although he was not conceited, he was young. He was accustomed to make a favorable impression. He knew that the Princess of Clam-Goritz had recently applied to him her sagacious definition of the lovable man: "He is lovable, because one always feels that one is in danger with him." It seemed to him, therefore, a little extraordinary that the simple-minded Lescande's simple-minded mother-in-law and simple-minded wife should endure his beams so calmly. That feeling made him lay aside his premeditated reserve. He exerted his powers of coquetry, not upon Madame Lescande, whom he had sworn to respect, but upon Madame Mursois, and he displayed throughout the evening, for the mother's benefit, fascinations which charmed the daughter. Lescande, meanwhile, with his mouth open to its fullest extent, gloried in his old friend's triumph.

The next afternoon Camors rode through Avenue Maillot on his way from the Bois. Madame Lescande chanced to be working on her balcony, and returned his salute over her embroidery frame. He noticed that she bowed well, with a slight duck of the head, followed by a well-bred motion of the shoulders.

When he called, as it was his duty to do, two or three days later, he had reflected : he was resolutely frigid in his manner, and talked to Madame Lescande of nothing but her husband's virtues. His conduct had an unfortunate result, for the young woman, who had reflected as well as he, whose virtue had taken alarm and who would undoubtedly have been frightened away by undisguised attentions, was reassured ; she abandoned herself without suspicion to the pleasure and pride of seeing and letting others see in her salon one of the stars of the heaven of her dreams.

It was then May, and there were to be races at La Marche on the following Sunday. Camors was to ride his own horse. Madame Mursois and her daughter induced Lescande to escort them. Camors gratified their dearest wish by taking them into the weighing enclosure. He walked with them back and forth in front of the grand stands. Madame Mursois, who was leaning on his arm, and who had never before enjoyed the privilege of being escorted in public by a cavalier arrayed in an orange-colored cap and top-boots, was swimming in a sea of azure, Lescande and his wife following, sharing her delirious bliss.

These pleasant relations continued for some weeks without apparently changing their character. One day Camors sat beside the ladies in front of the palace of the Exposition and completed their initiation into the secrets of the fashionables who passed in review before them. One evening he entered their box, condescended to remain there during one or two acts, and corrected their still rudimentary notions concerning the morals of the *corps de ballet*. In these various meetings the young man adopted toward Madame Lescande the language of a kindly, brotherly interest, perhaps because he sincerely adhered to his virtuous resolutions, perhaps because he was well aware that every road leads to Rome, that one as surely as any other. Madame Lescande meanwhile acquired renewed confidence, and, seeing that she was not called upon to defend herself, as she had apprehended at first, she thought that she might venture to take the offensive in a mild way. No woman is flattered to be loved as a sister. Camors, being somewhat disturbed by the turn affairs were taking, made some efforts to stay their course; but men who are skilful at fencing try in vain to spare their adversary; habit is stronger than they, and they thrust as well as parry in spite of themselves. Furthermore, he was beginning to be seriously enamored of Madame Lescande and her kittenish ways, at once shrewd and artless, curious and frightened, enticing and timid—in a word, charming.

On the same evening on which Monsieur de Camors

the elder returned home to kill himself, his son, riding through Avenue Maillot, was stopped by Lescande at the gate of his villa.

"My friend," he said, "as you are here, why not do me a great favor? I am summoned to Melun by telegram; I am compelled to start at once. Stay and dine with the ladies. They are both depressed. I don't know what the matter is with my wife; she has been crying all day over her embroidery. My mother-in-law has a sick headache. Your company will brighten them both up. Come in, I beg you."

Camors made some objections, then yielded. He sent away his horse. His friend presented him to the two women, who seemed really to be somewhat enlivened by the arrival of this unexpected guest. Lescande took a cab and left them, after receiving from his wife a more expansive caress than usual.

The dinner was very animated. There was a sort of smell of powder and of danger in the air, and Madame Lescande and Camors both secretly felt its stimulating effect. Their animation, still perfectly innocent, took the shape of the laughing skirmishes, the brisk combats of outposts which precede pitched battles.

About nine o'clock Madame Mursois's headache became very much worse, perhaps because of the smoke of the cigar Camors was allowed to indulge in. She could not sit up, and announced that she would be obliged to go to her room. Camors wished to take his leave, but

his carriage had not arrived, and Madame Mursois insisted that he should wait.

"My daughter," she said, "will play to you on the piano until it comes."

The young wife, left alone with her guest, seated herself at the piano.

"What would you like to have me play?" she said in a noticeably abrupt tone.

"*Mon Dieu !* —a waltz."

The waltz at an end, there was a pause. To break the silence she rose and said, rubbing her hands slowly together in an embarrassed way :

"It seems to me as if it would storm. Don't you think so?"

She walked to the window and out upon the balcony, whither Camors followed her. The sky was cloudless. In front of them was the dark line of the woods : a few stray moonbeams were sleeping on the lawns. Their wandering hands met and for a moment did not part.

"Juliette !" said the young man in a low, tremulous voice.

She shuddered, pushed away his hand and returned to the salon.

"Go, I entreat you," she said ; and seated herself suddenly upon her little sofa, making an imperative motion with her hand, which Camors did not heed.

The downfall of a virtuous woman is often bewilderingly rapid.

A few moments later young Madame Lescande awoke from her intoxication as utterly ruined as a woman can be.

It was not a pleasant waking. At the first glance she measured the depth of the bottomless, issueless abyss into which she had so suddenly fallen ; her husband, her mother, her child whirled about in the chaos of her brain like spectres. She passed her hand across her forehead two or three times, saying : " My God ! "—Then she rose and looked vaguely about, as if in search of a gleam of hope, a place of refuge. Nothing. Feeling the hopeless agony of the irreparable, her poor heart fell back helplessly upon her lover ; she fixed her swimming eyes upon him.

" How you must despise me ! " she said.

Camors, half kneeling on the carpet, raised his shoulders slightly in denial of the charge, and kissed her hand with absent-minded courtesy.

" You do, don't you ? " she continued in a supplicating tone. " Tell me ! "

He smiled a strange, cruel smile.

" Do not insist, I beg," he said.

" Why not ? Is it true—do you despise me ? "

He suddenly sprang to his feet and said, as he looked her in the face :

" *Pardieu*, yes ! "

To that appalling admission the young woman made no reply. A shriek was stifled in her throat. Her eyes

opened to an unnatural width, as if dilated by the touch of some poison.

Camors paced up and down the salon, then returned to her.

"You think me hateful," he said, in a short, fierce tone, "and so I am in fact; but it matters little. I am not the one to be considered. After doing you a vast injury there is one service—a single one—which I can render you, and I am rendering you that service now. I am telling you the truth! Women who fall,—mark what I say,—have no harsher judges than their accomplices. And so, what can you expect me to think of you? I have known your husband from childhood, to his undoing and my shame! There is not a drop of blood in his veins that is not devoted to you; there is not one moment's work in his day, not one midnight vigil that does not belong to you; all your comfort is the result of his sacrifices, all your joys are the fruit of his toil! That is what he is to you!—As to me, you have seen my name in a newspaper, you have seen me ride by your window—nothing more—and that is enough—and you surrender to me in a moment his whole life with your own, his whole happiness and honor with your own! I tell you that every ne'er-do-well, every libertine of my sort who takes advantage of your vanity and weakness as I have done, and then tells you that he respects you, lies! And if you think that he will at least love you, you are mistaken again. We speedily abhor the bonds that impose



duties upon us where we sought only pleasure ; our first care, as soon as they are formed, is to break them.—And—shall I tell you the whole, madame ? Women like yourself are not made to be the object of unholy passions like ours ; your charm consists in your virtue, and when you lose that, you lose everything. Virtuous women are awkward at our unhealthy debauches—their transports are puerile—their very downfall is absurd—and it is rare good fortune for them to meet, after their first slip, a wretch like myself who will say so to them ! And now, try to forget me—Adieu ! ”

Monsieur de Camors walked swiftly to the door of the salon and went out.

Madame Lescande had listened to him, sitting perfectly motionless and as white as marble. When he had disappeared she remained in the same deathlike attitude, her eyes staring into vacancy, her arms hanging by her sides, wishing with all her heart that death would go astray and lay his hand upon her. After a few moments had passed, she noticed a peculiar sound, which seemed to come from the next room : one would have said it was caused by an attempt to restrain violent, convulsive laughter. The most extraordinary and most alarming fancies flocked to the unhappy woman's mind : the idea which made the deepest impression upon her was that her husband had returned secretly, that he knew everything, and that the laughter she heard was the laughter of a madman. Feeling that her own wits were wander-

ing, she sprang to her feet, ran to the door and threw it open. The adjoining room was the dining-room ; it was dimly lighted by a lamp hanging from the ceiling.

She saw Camors half lying on the floor, sobbing wildly, and beating his head against the bars of a chair around which his arms were thrown in desperation.

She could find no words to say to him. She sat down beside him, let her heart overflow and wept silently. He dragged himself to her feet, seized the hem of her dress which he covered with kisses, and as soon as his heaving breast and trembling lips permitted him to utter a word :

“ Oh ! forgive me ! ” he cried, “ forgive me ! forgive me ! ”

That was all. He rose and left her. A moment later she heard the wheels of his carriage as he drove away.

If lack of principle were sufficient to ensure one against remorse, the French of both sexes would be as a general rule happier than they are ; but as the contrary is unfortunately the case, it happens every day that a young woman who believes in not much of anything, like Madame Lescande, and a young man who believes in nothing, like Monsieur de Camors, find that they cannot indulge themselves in a little moral independence without suffering cruelly therefor. A thousand old prejudices which they believed to be buried forever, suddenly rear their heads in their consciences, and, dead though they be, they kill.

Louis de Camors drove toward Paris at the smartest

gait of his trotting-horse, Fitz-Aymon—by Black Prince and Annabel—arousing as he passed, by the elegance of his person and his equipage, envious feelings which would have changed to pity, if mental wounds were visible. Bitter *ennui*, disgust with life and with himself were no new sentiments to this young man; but he had never felt them with such keen, stinging intensity as at that accursed hour when he was flying in hot haste from old Lescande's dishonored home. Never had any incident in his life cast so bright a light upon the depth of his moral degradation. By inflicting that base insult upon the friend of his spotless days, upon the cherished confidant of the noble thoughts and proud ambitions of his youth, he felt that he had trampled virtue itself under his feet. Like Macbeth, he had not simply murdered a sleeping man, he had murdered sleep.

When he reached the corner of Rue Royale and the boulevard, these reflections had become so unendurable to him, that he thought in turn of becoming a Trappist, of enlisting and of getting drunk. He decided in favor of the last course. Chance served his design admirably. As he alighted in front of his club, he found himself face to face with a thin, pale young man, who held out his hand to him with a smile; he recognized the Prince d'Errol.

"Ah! is it you, prince? I thought you were at Cairo."

"I arrived from there this morning."

"Indeed!—Your lungs are better, I trust?"

"Peuh!"

"Bah! you look well enough. And how about Cairo, is it amusing?"

"Peuh! not very!—By the way, Camors, God must have sent you!"

"Do you think so, prince? Why so, pray?"

"Because—I'll tell you about it directly—but first tell me about this affair of yours."

"What affair?"

"Your duel for Sarah."

"That is to say, against Sarah."

"What was it that happened?—I heard about it very indefinitely in Egypt."

"*Mon Dieu!* my dear fellow, I undertook to do a kind action, and, according to the invariable custom, I was punished for it. I had heard it said that that ass of a La Brède was borrowing money from a little sister of his to lay it at Sarah's huge feet. It really made no difference to me, as you can imagine, but it irritated me all the same. I could not resist the temptation to say to him one day at the club: 'You are making a very great mistake, La Brède, to ruin yourself, and especially to ruin mademoiselle your sister for such an unsympathetic clod as Sarah, a girl who always has a cold in her head, and who is false to you to boot.'—'False to me!' echoed La Brède, waving his long arms, 'false to me! with whom?'—'With me.'—As he knows

that I never lie, he tried to kill me. Luckily, I am tough."

"You put him to bed for three months, I am told."

"At the outside."

"Well, now, my dear friend, do me a favor.—I am a bear, a savage, a ghost.—Help me to get back into the swim, won't you? Let us go and take supper with some sportive persons of more than indifferent virtue. That is what the doctors prescribe for me."

"Doctors in Cairo? Nothing can be simpler, prince."

An hour later Louis de Camors and the Prince d'Errol, in company with some half-dozen boon-companions of both sexes, took possession of a private salon in a restaurant, whose closed doors we beg to be allowed to respect.

As day was breaking they came out.—Just at that moment a ragpicker with a long gray beard strayed like a ghost by the door of the restaurant, pulling over with his hook the piles of garbage that awaited the coming of the city sweepers. Camors, as he closed his purse with uncertain hand, dropped a louis, which rolled into the midst of the slimy débris banked against the curbstone. The ragpicker raised his head with a timid smile.

"Ah! monsieur," he said, "what falls into the ditch goes to the soldier."

"Pick it up with your teeth," said Camors, "and I'll give it to you."

The man hesitated and flushed under his coating of

tan. Then he cast a glance of deadly hatred at the young men and women who were laughing about him, and knelt; he stretched himself out on his chest in the filth, and, rising a moment later, showed them the gold piece between his sharp, white teeth. The giddy creatures applauded. He smiled gloomily and turned his back.

"I say, friend," said Camors, putting his finger on his shoulder, "do you want to earn five louis now? Strike me; it will please you and me too."

The man looked him in the face, muttered a few indistinguishable words and suddenly struck him in the face with such force that he sent him staggering against the wall. There was a movement among the young men as if they contemplated rushing at the graybeard.

"Let no one touch him!" said Camors hastily. "Here, my good man, here are your hundred francs."

"Keep them," said the other; "I am well paid!" And he walked away.

"Bravo, Belisarius!" cried Camors.—"On my word, messieurs, I don't know if you are like myself, but I am really delighted with this little fête.—I am going home to dream about it! Good-morning, mesdames! Au revoir, prince."

An early cab was passing through the street. He jumped in and ordered the driver to take him to his home on Rue Barbet-de-Jouy. The courtyard gate was open; a remnant of intoxication prevented his noticing a group of servants and neighbors standing in confusion

in front of the stables. They suddenly held their peace when they caught sight of him and watched him pass, exchanging unspoken expressions of sympathy and pity.

His rooms were on the second floor. As he was going up the stairs, he suddenly found himself face to face with his father's valet. The man was very pale: he held a folded paper which he offered him with a trembling hand.

"What is that, Joseph?" said Camors.

"It's a letter that Monsieur le Comte left for monsieur—before he went away."

"Before he went away?—My father has gone away?—Where has he gone?—Why has he gone?—Why do you weep?"

The servant, whose voice failed him, handed him the paper.

"Great God!—What is it? Why is there blood upon it?"

He hastily tore the envelope open and read the first words:

"My son, life bores me; I am done with it."

He read no more. The poor child loved his father in spite of everything. He fell senseless on the landing.—He was carried to his room.



## II

Louis de Camors, upon leaving college, plunged into life, it will be remembered, with his heart swollen with all the blessed virtues of youth—confidence, sympathy, enthusiasm, loyalty. The lamentable insufficiency of his early education had failed to corrupt in his veins the noble instincts, or, if you please, the germs of weakness, as his father called them, which his mother's milk seemed to have planted there. His father, when he placed him at school in order to be rid of him for ten years or more, rendered him the only service that he ever rendered him. Those old classic prisons have some good in them : the healthy discipline of the cloister, the constant contact with warm, uncorrupted hearts, long familiarity with great works, manly intellects and the mighty minds of ancient times—all these do not of course impart very well-defined moral precepts, but they inspire a certain ideal conception of life and duty, which has its value.

It will be remembered also that Camors asked nothing better than to discover the practical formula of this ill-defined heroism, of which he carried the idea away

from school with him—a formula applicable to the time and the country in which he was destined to live. He found, as one may imagine, that the task was a little more complicated than he had thought, and that the truth to which he proposed to devote himself, but which must first come forth from its well, showed little inclination so to do. He did not fail, however, to prepare himself to do knightly service in its cause as soon as it should have answered his call. He was entitled to the credit of having led, for several years, despite the passions natural to his years and the temptations of a life of opulence, the frugal, meditative, active life of a poor student. He studied for the bar, buried himself in libraries, attended the public courses of lectures, and accumulated, during those ardent, hard-working, youthful years, a vast store of knowledge, which his friends were destined later to discover with amazement beneath the luxurious frivolity of the *sportsman*.

But, while the young man was arming himself for the combat, he gradually lost what is of more value than the stoutest weapons and what no weapon can replace—courage. Search as he would for the truth, it always eluded him, became less clearly defined from day to day, and assumed, as in a fearful dream, the changing shapes and the thousand heads of the Chimeras.

Paris, about the middle of this century, was cumbered, so to speak, with social, political and religious ruins, amid which the keenest eye found it difficult to distin-

guish the shapes of new structures and the outlines of the edifices of the future. One could see that everything was razed, but one could not see that anything was rising.

In that confusion, above the ruins and the *disjecta membra* of the past, the powerful intellectual life of the age, the activity and concussion of ideas, the flaming light of the French intellect, criticism and science cast a dazzling gleam, which seemed, like the sun in the earliest ages, to illuminate the chaos without fertilizing it. The phenomena of death and those of life were confounded together in a vast fermenting mass wherein everything was decomposing and nothing seemed as yet to germinate. At no period in the world's history perhaps had the truth been less simple, more involved, more intricate, for it seemed that all the essential ideas of humanity had been recommitted to the flames at the same time, and that not one of them was likely to come forth unchanged.

It is a grand spectacle ; but it is profoundly disquieting to men's minds, to those at least which interest and inquisitiveness are not sufficient to fill, that is to say, the great majority. To disentangle from that boiling chaos a well-grounded moral religion, a positive social idea, an assured political faith, is a difficult undertaking for the most sincere. We must hope, however, that it is not beyond the strength of a man of earnest will, and perhaps Louis de Camors would have accomplished it to his last-

ing honor, if he had had more trustworthy guides and better sources of information to assist him. It is the common misfortune of all those who enter society, to find men less pure than ideas; but Camors was born under a peculiarly unlucky star in that regard, as he found in his immediate surroundings, in his very family, only the evil sides and in a certain sense the opposite of all the opinions he might have been tempted to espouse.

It becomes necessary to say a few words concerning his family.

The Camors were originally from Bretagne, where they owned immense estates in the last century, notably great tracts of woodland which still bear their name. Louis's grandfather, Comte Hervé de Camors, upon returning from abroad after the Restoration, had bought back a small part of his hereditary domains. He had established himself there in the old style and had nourished to the last day of his life incurable prejudices against the French Revolution and against King Louis XVIII. He had had four children, two sons and two daughters, and he had thought it his duty to protest against the equalizing level of the Civil Code by creating during his lifetime, by a legal subterfuge, a sort of estate tail in favor of his oldest son, Charles-Henri, to the detriment of Robert-Sosthène, Éléonore-Jeanne and Louise-Élisabeth, his other heirs-at-law. Éléonore-Jeanne and Louise-Élisabeth accepted with apparent submission the proceeding that enriched their brother at

their expense, although they never forgave him for it; but Robert-Sosthène, who, in his capacity of younger son, affected vague liberal opinions and was, moreover, over head and ears in debt, rebelled openly against his father's conduct. He threw into the fire his visiting cards, adorned with a helmet, below which were the words: *Chevalier Lange d'Ardennes de Camors*; ordered new ones with the simple inscription: *Dardennes jeune (du Morbihan)*, and sent a specimen to his father. From that day forth he posed as a republican.

There are some people who are attached to a party by their virtues, others by their vices. There is not an accredited political party which is not founded upon a genuine principle and which does not respond to some legitimate aspiration of human society. Nor is there one which may not be used as a pretext, a shelter and a stepping-stone for some of the baser passions of our kind. The most advanced section of the liberal party in France is composed of generous, earnest, determined spirits who act under the spur of what is surely a lofty idea: the idea of a vigorous society, constituted with a sort of philosophical perfection, master of itself every hour in every day, delegating few of its rights, parting with none, living, not without laws but without masters, and developing its energy, its well-being, its genius with all the amplitude of justice, independence and dignity which the republican form of government alone bestows upon each and all. Every other social system seems to

them to retain something of the slavery and iniquities of the old world, and to be open at the very least to the suspicion of creating between governors and governed dissimilar and sometimes hostile interests. In short, they demand for the nation the form of government which, beyond controversy, possesses the esteem of mankind in the greatest measure. We may dispute the practical opportuneness of their aims, we cannot deny the grandeur of their principles. They are in reality a race of noble hearts and minds. In all times they have had their sincere Puritans, their heroes, their martyrs; but in all times they have had also, like all parties, their false partisans, their adventurers, their radicals, who are their most dangerous enemies. Dardennes jeune, probably to earn forgiveness for the doubtful origin of his convictions, was destined to take his place in the ranks of the latter class.

Louis de Camors, up to the day he left college, had never seen his uncle Dardennes, who had always been at variance with his father; but he professed for him in secret a fanatical admiration, attributing to him all the virtues of the principle which the soi-disant republic represented in his eyes. The Republic of 1848 was then breathing its last, and his uncle was one of the vanquished. That was an additional attraction to the younger man. He went to see him, without his father's knowledge, as a sort of pilgrimage, and was well received. He found him in a state of exasperation, not so much

against his political opponents as against his own party, whom he accused of causing their own disasters.

"Revolutions," he said in a solemn, dogmatic tone, "revolutions are not to be carried out with gloved hands. The men of '93 had no gloves; you can't make an omelet without breaking the eggs. The pioneers of the future must march with axe in hand. The chrysalis of nations doesn't open on rosebushes. Liberty is a goddess born of great holocausts. If we had terrorized France in '48, we should have retained the mastery!"

These high-sounding maxims astonished Louis de Camors. In his boyish innocence he was infinitely grateful to the upright men who had governed their country in those perilous days, not only because they had laid down the reins of government as poor as when they had taken them up, but also because their hands bore no stain of blood. To that homage which posterity will render them and which will afford them revenge for much contemporary injustice, he added a reproach which was hardly consistent with his uncle's strange grievances against them: he reproached them for not having more outspokenly, even though it were only in the details of the stage-setting, divorced the new republic from the evil memories of the former one. Far from believing, as his uncle did, that a repetition of the performances of '93 would have assured the triumph of the republic, he believed that the bloody spectre of the past was the sole cause of its downfall, and that, thanks to the much-



vaunted Reign of Terror, France was the only country in the world where the perils of liberty would seem, perhaps for centuries to come, disproportioned to its benefits.

It is useless to dwell longer upon the relations between Louis de Camors and his uncle Dardennes. It will be readily understood that they sowed distrust and discouragement in his mind, that he made the common mistake of holding the cause as a whole responsible for the violent sentiments, not too earnestly disavowed, of one of its less worthy apostles, and that he fell a victim to the fatal habit, too common in France, of confounding the word progress with the word disorder, liberty with license, and the Revolution with the Terror.

The natural effect of irritation and disenchantment upon that ardent young mind was to throw it back abruptly toward the pole of diametrically opposite opinions. Camors said to himself that, after all, his birth, his name, his position in his family pointed out to him his real duty, which was to combat the despotic and bloodthirsty doctrines which he thenceforth detected at the root of all democratic theories. There was another thing that had offended and repelled him in his uncle's ordinary speech, and that was his profession of absolute atheism. He had himself, without any very well-defined belief, a substratum of general faith, of respect, and of a sort of religious sensitiveness which was stung to the quick by cynical impiety. Furthermore, he did not under-

stand, and he never understood in the whole course of his life, how principles could support themselves by their own weight in the human conscience, if they had no roots and no sanction from a higher power.—Either a God or no principles!—that was a dilemma from which no German philosopher could extricate him.

This reaction in his ideas drew him nearer to the other branches of his family, which he had somewhat neglected theretofore. His two aunts lived at Paris. Both of them, by reason of the diminution of their dowries, had been required to make some concessions in order to enter the married state. The elder, Éléonore-Jeanne, had married during her father's lifetime the Comte de la Roche-Jugan, who had passed his fiftieth year but who was a very attractive man. He deserved to be loved. Nevertheless, his wife did not love him, as their views upon certain vital points differed materially. Monsieur de la Roche-Jugan was one of those men who had served the government of the Restoration with inviolable but unenthusiastic devotion. He had been attached in his youth to the ministry and the person of the Duc de Richelieu, and he had imbibed, from the lessons and the example of that illustrious personage, elevated and moderate sentiments, warm-hearted patriotism and fidelity without illusions. He saw from afar the pitfalls that threatened the government, displeased the prince by pointing them out to him and followed him into them. Returning to private life with

but slender means, he retained his political faith rather as a religion than as a hope. His hopes, his energy, his love for well-doing, he turned them all toward God. His piety, as enlightened as it was deep-rooted, led him to take his place in that band of choice spirits who were then exerting themselves to reconcile the ancient national faith with the irrevocable freedom of modern thought. In that task he, like most of his noble-hearted friends, had experiences that caused him deadly sadness, so deadly that he succumbed to it. His wife, it is true, contributed not a little to hasten the end of an estimable life by her intemperate zeal and the bitterness of her narrow-minded piety. She was a person with a small heart and unbounded pride, who made use of God to serve her passions as Dardennes jeune made use of liberty to serve his hatred. As soon as she became a widow, she purified her salon: thenceforth no one was to be seen there save parish priests more orthodox than their bishop, French priests who denied Bossuet, and, as a consequence, the religion was saved in France. Louis de Camors, admitted to that abode of the elect in the twofold capacity of kinsman and neophyte, found there the piety of Louis XI., and the charity of Catherine de Médicis, and soon lost what little faith he had.

He asked himself sadly if there were no mean between the Terror and the Inquisition, and if in this world one must needs be a fanatic or nothing. He sought for some intermediate doctrine, advanced with the strength and

cohesion of a political party behind it, but he could find none.

It seemed to him then as if all life had taken refuge in extreme opinions, and as if everyone who was not violent and fanatical in political or religious matters was indifferent and slothful, living from day to day, without principles and without faith. Such at least seemed to him the personage whom the deplorable hazards of life put before him as the type of temperate politicians.

The younger of his aunts, Louise-Élisabeth, who had a liking for worldly pleasures, had taken advantage of her father's death to make a wealthy *mésalliance*. She had married Baron Tonnelier, whose grandfather was a miller, but whose father, a deserving and honorable man, had occupied exalted posts under the first empire. Baron Tonnelier had a large fortune, which he added to every day by successful speculation. He had been in his youth a handsome gallant, a Voltairean and a liberal. As time passed he had continued to be a Voltairean, but he had ceased to be a handsome gallant and was still farther removed from being a liberal. So long as he was a simple deputy, he had, now and then, a democratic aspiration; but on the day when he became a peer of France, he definitively recognized the fact that the human race could make no further progress. The French Revolution was ended: it had attained its supreme object. No one henceforth could walk or speak or write or grow great: it annoyed him. If he had been sincere,

he would have admitted that he could not conceive how there could ever be storms or thunder and lightning, or why nature was not perfectly happy and peaceful, since he himself was in that condition.

When his nephew was in a position to appreciate him, Baron Tonnelier was no longer a peer of France ; but, being one of those who never hurt themselves when they fall, but sometimes even help themselves, he had risen to a very exalted position in the official world, and he was conscientiously striving to serve the new government as faithfully as he had served the preceding one. He talked with strange unconcern of suppressing this or that newspaper or professor or orator or book, of suppressing anything and everything except himself. To hear him talk, France had been on the wrong road since 1789, and the need of the hour was to take her back to a period earlier than that fatal year. He did not speak, by the way, of returning to his grandfather's mill himself, which was inconsistent. If the old man had met Liberty, his mother, in a dark wood, he would have strangled her. We will add regretfully that he was accustomed to characterize as *bousingots* <sup>1</sup> those members of the ministry who were suspected of liberal leanings, and especially those who declared in favor of the education of the masses. Never, in a word, did a worse adviser stand near a throne. Luckily, although he stood near it in the matter of dignity, he was far removed from it in the matter of confidence.

In other respects he was an agreeable man, still robust and still addicted to the fair sex, the latter characteristic being even more noticeable than the former. The result was that his morals were far from exemplary. He haunted the wings assiduously. He had two daughters recently married, in whose presence he freely repeated the most piquant jests of Voltaire and the vilest of Tallemant des Réaux's short stories ; that is why both of them promised to furnish a series of interesting anecdotes to the *chronique scandaleuse* of their time, as their mother had before them.

While Louis de Camors was learning by the precept and example of the collateral branches of his family to distrust all principles and all convictions alike, his terrible father dealt the final blow. Exclusively a man of pleasure, depraved to the marrow of his bones, utterly selfish, past master in the art of mockery as practised in the first society of Paris, deeming himself above everything because he decried everything, and taking pleasure at the last in sneering at all the duties he had shirked throughout his life—such was his father. And withal, the honor of his club ; of commanding presence and possessed of an indefinable imposing fascination. The father and the son saw little of each other, Monsieur de Camors being much too proud to involve his son in his own dissipated life ; but they sometimes met at their meals. At such times he listened with his cold, mocking manner to the younger man's enthusiastic or dis-

heartened stories ; he never did him the honor of entering into a serious controversy with him : he always answered with a few bitter, supercilious words which his son could feel falling like ice-cold drops upon what flame remained in his heart.

As discouragement gained upon him, he lost his enthusiasm for work and abandoned himself more and more to the pleasures of idlers of his rank, which were waiting to be enjoyed. As he abandoned himself to them he conceived a liking for them ; he carried into them all the seductive charm of his youth and his superior mental powers, but at the same time a gloomy and sometimes violent dejection. All his roughness and unevenness of temper did not prevent his being a favorite with women and made him suspicious of men. He was imitated. He was instrumental in founding the charming school of unsmiling youth. His air of ennui and weariness, which had in his case the excuse of a grave cause, was copied slavishly by young men who had never known any other pangs than those of an overburdened stomach, but who were pleased none the less to appear withered in their bloom and to despise mankind. We have made the acquaintance of Camors in that phase of his existence. Nothing could be more artificial, it is clear, than the careless disdain with which he wore his mask. In falling into the common grave of doubt, he was superior to most of his contemporaries in that he did not make his bed there with cowardly resignation. He rose and



struggled violently and incessantly to climb out. Strong minds do not readily fall asleep. Indifference is burdensome to them. They need a moving spring, a reason for living, a reason for acting, a belief. Louis de Camors was to find his at last.



### III

His father had not told him everything in his ante-mortem communication. In addition to his counsel as to the methods of achieving success, he also bequeathed him the necessity of doing so, for the Comte de Camors was three-fourths ruined. The wreck of his fortune began years before. He had married to repair the breaches he had made in it ; but the operation did not prove successful. A considerable inheritance, upon which he had relied as certain to fall to his wife, had gone elsewhere. A benevolent institution had profited by it. The Comte de Camors had instituted proceedings against the legatees before the Council of State ; then he had consented to compromise for an annuity of thirty thousand francs, which of course died with him. He still enjoyed some fat sinecures which his name, his social relations and his imposing manner had procured for him in certain great financial concerns. Those sources of income did not survive him. He was only a tenant of the house he lived in, and the new Comte de Camors was reduced at last to his mother's marriage portion, which was a paltry pittance for a man of his rank and his tastes.

His father had, by the way, given him to understand more than once that he had nothing to hope for after his death. Therefore the young man had long since become wonted to the prospect, and, when it was realized, he was neither so surprised nor so deeply impressed as he should have been by the reckless selfishness of which he was the victim. His veneration for his father was not changed by it, and he read with no less respect and confidence the extraordinary document placed at the beginning of this narrative. The moral theories put forth therein were not new to him ; they were in the air, he had many a time turned them over hurriedly in his fevered brain ; but they had never before appeared to him with the concentrated force of a dogma, with the concise clearness of a practical system of action, nor above all, with the authority of such a voice and such an example.

An incident occurred that materially strengthened the impression produced upon his mind by his father's last words. A week after his death, he was half reclining on the couch in his smoking-room, his face as dark as night and as the thoughts with which his mind was filled, when a servant entered and handed him a card. He took it and read : *Lescande, Architect*. Two red spots suddenly appeared on his pale cheeks.

"I am not at home," he said.

"That is what I told the gentleman," the servant replied ; "but he was so extraordinarily persistent—"

"Extraordinarily?"

"Yes, monsieur, as if he had some very important business with monsieur."

"Very important?"—Camors again repeated the servant's words, looking him in the eye.—"Admit him."

Camors rose and walked up and down the room. A bitter yet sorrowful smile played about his lips, and he muttered :

"Shall I have to kill him now?"

Lescande was ushered into the room and his first gesture dissipated the apprehension that those words betrayed. He rushed forward and seized the young count's hands. Camors noticed, however, that his features were discomposed and that his lips trembled.

"Be seated," he said, "and calm yourself."

"My friend," said Lescande, after a moment, "I am very late in coming to see you. I ask your pardon—but I have been so miserable myself! You see, I am in mourning—"

Camors felt a shudder in his very bones.

"In mourning," he said, "why so?"

"Juliette is dead," said Lescande. And he hid his eyes behind his broad hand.

"My God!" said Camors in a hollow voice.

He listened for a moment to Lescande's sobs. He made a motion to take his hand but did not dare.

"Is it possible!" he exclaimed.

"It came so suddenly," said Lescande, "that it seems like a dream—a horrible dream. She wasn't well, you know, the last time you came; I remember telling you so. She had been crying all day—poor child! The next day, when I came home, she had been taken sick—Congestion of the lungs—of the brain too, I don't know what—at all events she is dead—and so sweet and loving to the last moment, my friend!—Half an hour before she died she called me and said: 'Oh! I loved you so much! I loved you so much! I never loved anybody but you—really nobody but you! Forgive me! forgive me!'—Forgive her! my God, for what? For dying, probably! for she never caused me a moment's sorrow before! O God of mercy!"

"I beg you, my friend—"

"Yes, yes! I am wrong, forgive me! You have sorrow of your own; but men are selfish, you know. That isn't what I came to see you about, my friend. Tell me—I don't know how much truth there may be in a rumor I have heard. You will forgive me if I am wrong. I am very far from meaning to offend you, you must know; but they say that you are in somewhat straitened circumstances. If that is so, my friend—"

"It is not so."

"But if it were so—I am not going to keep my little house out yonder, you understand; what good is it to me now? As for my son, he can wait; I will work for him. Well, when my house is sold I shall have two hundred

thousand francs, and half of it is at your service ; you may return it when you are able."

"Thanks, my friend," said Camors. "Really I am in need of nothing. There is some little confusion here, but I am still richer than you."

"True, but with your tastes—"

"In pity's name !"

"At all events, you will always know where to find me—and I can count upon you, can I not?"

"Yes."

"Adieu, my friend. I pain you—I will go—au revoir. You are sorry for me, aren't you?"

"Yes, au revoir."

Lescande left the room.

The young count remained where he stood, motionless, his eyes staring into vacancy. His features moved convulsively. It was a decisive moment in his life. There are moments when the need of self-extinction makes itself felt so strongly that men believe in its efficacy and resort to it. In presence of that unhappy man, so basely betrayed, so broken-hearted, so trustful, Camors, if there were any truth in the old spiritualistic morality, must have realized that he had been guilty of an atrocious crime which doomed him to unendurable remorse ; but if it were true that the human flock was the purely material result of the forces of nature, producing strong creatures and weak creatures, lambs and lions, at random—then he had simply followed his trade



as a lion in slaughtering his comrade. He said to himself, with his father's testament under his eyes, that it was so, and he became calm once more.

The more he reflected, on that day and the days that followed, in the perfect retirement in which he took refuge, the more convinced he became that that doctrine was the truth that he had so long sought, and that his father had bequeathed to him the true formula for the guidance of his life. His heart, exhausted by discouragement and inertia, his cold, empty heart, opened with a sort of blissful delight to the light that filled and warmed it. From that moment he had a belief, a principle of action, a plan of existence, all that he lacked before; and he was no longer conscious of what had oppressed him hitherto—his doubts, his perplexity, his remorse. Indeed, that doctrine was an exalted, or at least a vainglorious one: it satisfied his pride and justified his contempt. To preserve his own esteem, it would be enough for him to be true to the laws of honor, to do nothing low, as his father expressed it, and he was determined to do nothing that should have that character in his eyes. Furthermore, there were men—had he not met such?—deeply imbued with the materialistic dogma, who were nevertheless reckoned among the most honorable men of their time. Perhaps he might have asked himself if that undeniable fact should not be attributed to the individuals rather than to their doctrines, and if there are not, in evil as in good, men who believe

but do not practise. However that may have been, from that crisis Louis de Camors took his father's testament for the programme of his life.

To develop to their fullest extent the physical and intellectual gifts which he owed to chance, to make of himself the perfect type of the highest civilization of his time, to fascinate women and dominate men, to indulge in all the enjoyments of the mind, the senses and power, to subdue all the natural feelings as so many slavish instincts, to look down upon all common beliefs as chimeras or hypocrisy, to love nothing, to fear nothing, and to respect honor only—such were in brief the duties that he recognized and the privileges that he assumed.

With those formidable weapons, wielded by a rare intelligence and powerful will, he returned to the world, with grave and tranquil brow, with a caressing and pitiless eye, and with a smile on his lips, as we have seen him. From that moment there was no shadow of a cloud in his mind or on his features, which by the way seemed to grow no older.

He resolved, first of all, not to abandon his position and to maintain, notwithstanding the present slenderness of his income, his fashionable and luxurious habits, even though he had to live for a few years on his principal. Pride and policy agreed in giving him that advice. He was well aware that the world is as hard in its dealings with those who work as it is ready to assist those who lack nothing. If he had not known it, the first attitude

assumed by his family after his father's death would have opened his eyes sufficiently in that respect. His aunt De la Roche-Jugan and his uncle Tonnelier manifested at that crisis the cool circumspection of people who suspect that they may have to deal with one who needs assistance. Indeed, for greater security, they left Paris, neglecting to inform the young count what place of retirement they had selected in which to hide their grief. However, he was soon to learn. While he was settling his father's affairs and giving shape to his ambitious projects for obtaining wealth and renown, he was treated to a very decided surprise one fine morning in the month of August.

He counted among his relations one of the wealthiest landed proprietors in France, General Marquis de Campvallon d'Arminges, famous in the Corps Législatif for his terrifying interruptions. He had a voice of thunder, and when he exclaimed in that voice of thunder: "Bah!—Nonsense!—Enough of this!—Order of the day!" the amphitheatre trembled in its farthest recesses and messieurs the commissioners of the government leaped in their seats. He was, in other respects, one of the best men in the world, although he had killed two of his fellow creatures in duels; but he had had his reasons.—Camors knew him but little; he strictly performed all the duties that kinship and courtesy demanded, met him at the club, sometimes took a seat at his whist table, and that was all. Two years earlier the general had lost a

nephew who was the direct heir to his name and his property, and he was consequently besieged by a swarm of eager cousins and collateral relations, among whom Madame de la Roche-Jugan and Baronne Tonnelier were in the front rank. Camors was of a different humor, and he had, since that time, shown more reserve than ever in his relations with the general.

Not without astonishment therefore did he receive the following note :

“MY DEAR KINSMAN,

“Your two aunts and their families are visiting me in the country. If it is agreeable to you to join them, I shall always be happy to offer a cordial welcome to the son of an old friend and companion in arms. I called upon you before I left Paris ; but you were invisible. I understood your grief. You have suffered an irreparable loss : I felt it keenly.

“Accept, my dear kinsman, my warmest regards.

“General Marquis DE CAMPVALLON D’ARMINGES.

Château de Campvallon, on the Western railway.

“*Post-scriptum*.—It is possible, my young cousin, that I may have something to say to you on an interesting subject !”

That concluding sentence and the exclamation point that followed it did not fail to disturb slightly the impassive tranquillity in which Monsieur de Camors was serving an apprenticeship at that moment. He could not

prevent himself from detecting, behind the veil of that mysterious postscript, the gleam of the seven hundred thousand francs a year in real estate in which the general's magnificent fortune consisted. He remembered that his father, who had served some time in Africa, had been attached to Monsieur de Campvallou's person as aide-de-camp, and that he had rendered him a service of some moment in a serious emergency. He was perfectly well aware, however, of the absurdity of such dreams, and having determined to set his mind at rest, he started for Campvallou two days later.

After undergoing for seven or eight hours all the comfort and convenience which the Western railway has the reputation of affording travellers, Monsieur de Camors arrived toward evening at the — station, where one of the general's carriages was waiting. The seignorial pile of the Château de Campvallou soon appeared upon an elevation whose slopes were covered with magnificent woods which descended majestically to the level ground, where they extended far in every direction.

It was the dinner hour ; the young man arranged his dress a little and descended almost immediately to the salon, where his presence seemed to cause some constraint in the bosom of the family. The general, by way of compensation, welcomed him most warmly ; but, as his imagination was limited, he could find nothing better to do than to repeat the expressions he had used in his letter, shaking his hand as if he would wring it off :

"The son of an old friend, a comrade in arms!" He uttered the words in his rich, sonorous voice, with such emphasis that he himself was impressed by them; for it was a noticeable fact that the general was always astonished and fascinated by the words that came from his mouth, as if they suddenly revealed to him the amplitude of his ideas and the profundity of his sentiments. To complete his portrait, he was a man of medium height, square-shouldered and corpulent, puffing when he went upstairs, and sometimes on level ground; a face as broad as a mask, reminding one of the Chimeras that breathe flames through their nostrils; a heavy, bristling white moustache, and small gray eyes, always fixed like a child's, but awe-inspiring. He would walk straight at you from a distance, slowly, sedately, his eye glaring as if he would fascinate you with it, as in a duel to the death, and then would ask you what time it was.

Camors was aware of this innocent mania of his host, and yet he was deceived by it once in the course of the evening. They had just left the dinner-table, and he was standing dejectedly in a window recess, a cup of coffee in his hand, when he saw the general coming toward him from the extreme end of the salon, with a solemn, confidential manner which seemed to indicate a communication of the utmost importance. The post-script came to his mind and he thought that he might expect an immediate explanation. The general, having finally reached his side, seized a button of his coat, led

him to the farther end of the recess and said, looking him in the eye as if he would have liked to turn him to stone :

“What do you take in the morning, young man?”

“Tea, general.”

“Very good ! you will give your orders to Pierre—as if you were at home.”

Whereupon he turned on his heel with military precision and rejoined the ladies, leaving Camors to digest his little trick as best he could.

A week passed away. On two other occasions the general selected his guest as the objective point of his terrifying marches : the first time, after walking up to him and staring him out of countenance, he contented himself by saying : “Well, young man?” and passed on. The second time he said nothing, and passed on as before. Evidently, the general did not remember that he had ever written anything like a postscript. Monsieur de Camors accepted that solution, but he asked himself what there was for him to do at Campvallon, between his family, for whom he had little affection, and the country, which he abhorred. Luckily there was in the château a library richly stocked with works upon jurisprudence, political economy, civil government and international law. He took advantage of it to take up the thread of serious work which he had broken off in his time of discouragement, and, buried in the hard study in which his active intellect and his awakened ambition delighted, he



waited contentedly enough for the time when propriety would permit him to take leave of his father's old friend and comrade in arms.

He rode in the morning, gave a lesson in fencing to his cousin Sigismond, Madame de la Roche-Jugan's only son, shut himself up all day in the library, and in the evening played *béziq*ue with the general, watching with a philosophic eye the struggle of the greedy horde who were fluttering about that rich prey.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan had invented a singular method of paying her court to the general, namely, to persuade him that he had heart disease. She felt his pulse every moment with her plump hand, and sometimes encouraged him, sometimes inspired in him a salutary fear, although he denied it.

"Deuce take it! my dear countess," he would say, "pray leave me in peace! I know well enough that I am mortal, like everybody, *pardieu!* But what then? Oh! bless my soul! I see what you are aiming at; I see perfectly what you are aiming at, my dear woman! you want to convert me!—Ta, ta, ta!"

She did not wish to convert him simply, she wanted to marry him and bury him. Her hopes in that direction were based principally upon her son Sigismond. Everybody knew that the general deeply regretted having no heir to his name. To do away with that regret he had only to marry Madame de la Roche-Jugan and adopt her son. Without ever permitting herself to

allude directly to that combination, the countess did her utmost to lead the general's mind to it, with all the persistent craft of a woman, all the covetous ardor of a mother, and all the unctuous policy of a devotee.

Her sister Tonnelier was bitterly conscious of her disadvantage. She was not a widow and she had no son ; but she had two daughters, attractive both, more than fashionable, and as lively as gunpowder. One, Madame Bacquière, was the wife of a broker ; the other, Madame Van Cuypp, of a young Dutchman in business in Paris. Both of them took a cheerful view of life and marriage, doting on something from year's end to year's end, dancing, riding, hunting, boating, flirting, and singing jauntily the sportive ballads of the small theatres. Camors, in his days of dejection, had utterly disapproved of those attractive little models of worldly dissipation and feminine frivolity. Since his point of view had changed he did them more than justice.

"They are," he coolly observed, "pretty animals who follow their instincts."

Madame Bacquière and Madame Van Cuypp, advised by their worthy mother, devoted themselves to making the general feel all the sweetness and sanctity of family joys and the domestic fireside. They enlivened his house to an extraordinary degree, used up his horses, slaughtered his game and demolished his piano. It seemed to them that the general, having once become accustomed to those pleasant surroundings and that

animation, would be unable to do without them, and that the delights of family life would become indispensable to him. In addition to these clever manoeuvres, they lavished upon the old man delicate filial attentions well adapted to win an old man's heart. They sat on his knee like children, pulled his moustaches gently, and tied the military knot of his cravat in the latest style.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan, in her confidential conversations with the general, deplored the evil bringing-up of her nieces, while Baronne Tonnelier, on her side, let slip no opportunity to set forth in bold relief the impertinent and cunning insignificance of young Comte Sigismond.

Amid these elevating struggles, one person who took no part whatever in them attracted Monsieur de Camors's notice to a high degree, in the first place by her beauty and secondly by her conduct. She was an orphan, of illustrious name, but very poor, whose cousins, Madame de la Roche-Jugan and Madame Tonnelier, had jointly accepted the responsibility of taking charge of her. Mademoiselle Charlotte de Luc d'Estrelles passed six months in each year with the countess and six with the baroness. She was at this time twenty-five years old. She was tall and light, with deep-set eyes, shaded to some extent by the protruding arches of her almost black eyebrows. The dense masses of her hair framed a noble but melancholy brow. She was badly dressed, or poorly, having never been willing to wear her relations' cast-off

clothes; but her woollen dresses, made with her own hand, fell in graceful folds like the drapery of an antique statue. Her Tonnelier cousins called her *the goddess*. They detested her and she despised them. But the name they bestowed upon her in irony was wonderfully appropriate. When she walked, you would have said that she had just stepped down from a pedestal. Her head seemed a little small, like that of the Greek statues; her delicate, sensitive nostrils seemed to have been carved from transparent ivory by a hand of exquisite delicacy of touch.

She had the strange, wild manner which we attribute to huntress nymphs. Her voice was superb and she used it with excellent taste. She had, so far as one could tell, a lively appreciation of the artistic; but she was a person of few words, whose thoughts one was compelled to divine. Many times before, Camors had found himself wondering with interest what was taking place in that self-centred mind. Impelled by his natural generosity and also by his secret admiration, he had always made it a point of honor to render that poor cousin all the homage he would have rendered a queen; but she had always seemed as indifferent to the attentions of her young kinsman as to the diametrically opposite conduct of her grudging benefactresses.

Her bearing at the Château de Campvallou was most curious. More silent than ever, absent-minded, distraught, as if she were meditating some deep-laid scheme,

she would suddenly arouse herself, raise her long lashes, turn her blue eyes on this side and that, and suddenly let them rest on Camors, who shuddered involuntarily.

One afternoon, when he was in the library, there was a gentle tap at the door, and Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles entered. She was quite pale. He rose, somewhat surprised, and bowed.

"I have something to say to you, cousin," she said in her melodious, grave voice, slightly hurried by evident excitement.

He looked at her, pointed to a couch, and sat down on a chair in front of her.

"My cousin," she continued, "you hardly know me; but I am brave and outspoken: I go straight to my point. Is it true that you are ruined?"

"Why do you ask, mademoiselle?"

"You have always been kind to me and you are the only one who has been. I am grateful to you for it, indeed I—"

She paused and a rosy flush overspread her cheeks; then she shook her head and smiled, like one who found it difficult to summon up her courage.

"I am ready," she resumed, "to give my life to you. You will deem me very romantic; but I have formed a very pleasant picture of your poverty and mine joined together. I think—I am sure that I should be an excellent wife to a husband whom I loved. If you have to leave France, as I have heard it said that you would, I

will go with you. I will be, everywhere and always, your faithful, brave companion.—Pardon me ! one word more, Monsieur de Camors, this that I am doing would be shameful, if it concealed any ulterior motive ; but it does not. I am poor ; I have fifteen hundred francs a year. If you are richer than I am, I have said nothing, and nothing in the world would induce me to marry you.”

She ceased and fixed her great, flashing eyes upon him with an expression in which suspense, distress and candor were strangely combined.

There was a solemn pause. Between those two beings, noble and attractive both, it seemed as if a momentous destiny were hanging in the balance at that moment, and as if both were conscious of it.

At last Monsieur de Camors replied in a grave voice :

“Mademoiselle, it is impossible for you to conceive what a test you have just subjected me to ; but I have gone down into my heart and I have found nothing there that is worthy of you. Do me the honor to believe that there is no question here of your fortune or my own, but I have determined never to marry.”

She drew a long breath and rose.

“Adieu, cousin,” she said.

“I beg you, stay one moment. I entreat you !” said the young man, gently pushing her back upon the divan.

She resumed her seat. He took a few steps at random to allay his agitation ; then, half-sitting on the table, facing the girl, he asked :

"You are unhappy, Mademoiselle Charlotte, are you not?"

"A little," she replied.

"I don't mean at this moment, but always."

"Always."

"My aunt De la Roche-Jugan treats you badly?"

"She does indeed. She is afraid that I will seduce her son. Great Heaven!"

"The little Tonneliers are jealous of you?—and my uncle Tonnelier persecutes you, does he not?"

"Shamefully," said she. And two tears started from her eyes, like diamonds.

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, what do you think of my aunt's religion?"

"What would you have me think of a religion that inculcates no virtue and takes away no vice?"

"Then you are something of a believer?"

"One can believe in God and the Gospel without believing in your aunt's religion."

"My aunt is trying to drive you into a convent. Why don't you go there?"

"I love life."

He looked at her a moment without speaking, then resumed:

"Yes, you love life, sunlight, thought, art, luxury, everything that is beautiful as you are.—Very well, Mademoiselle Charlotte, all those things are within reach of your hand. Why don't you take them?"



She seemed surprised and somewhat disturbed.

"What?" she said.

"If, as I believe, you have as much strength of mind as you have intelligence and beauty, you can escape forever from the miserable subjection fate has imposed on you. Royally endowed as you are, you have it in your power to be a great artiste to-morrow, independent, fêted, adored, wealthy, mistress of Paris and the world."

"And yours, I suppose?" said the strange girl.

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Charlotte. I suspected you of no equivocal purpose when you offered to share my uncertain poverty. Do me the like justice at this moment, I beg you. My moral principles are very broad, it is true; but I am as proud as you are, and I do not approach my goal by subterranean passages. Although you seem to me beautiful and fascinating beyond measure, I am guided by a feeling superior to any personal interest. I am deeply touched by your sympathetic outburst in my direction, and I am seeking to prove my gratitude by such counsel as a real friend would give. As you suspect me of the noble design of corrupting you for my own benefit, I say no more, mademoiselle, and I restore your liberty of action."

"Go on, monsieur."

"You will listen to me trustfully?"

"Yes."

"Very well. You have seen little of the world, Mademoiselle Charlotte; but you have seen enough of

it to pass judgment upon it and to know what store you should set by its esteem. The world is your family and my own : Monsieur Tonnelier, Madame Tonnelier, Mesdemoiselles Tonnelier, Madame de la Roche-Jugan and little Sigismond.—Well, Mademoiselle Charlotte, on the day that you become a great artiste, rich, successful, idolized, drinking freely of all the joys of life, on that day my uncle Tonnelier will most assuredly invoke outraged morality, Madame Tonnelier will swoon with shame in the arms of her old lovers, and my aunt De la Roche-Jugan will raise her yellow eyes to heaven, groaning bitterly ; but, after all, mademoiselle, what harm can that do you ? ”

“ You advise me to turn courtesan ? ”

“ By no means. I advise you simply to be an artiste, an actress, despite public opinion, because it is the only career in which you can find independence and wealth. There is no law, by the way, that prevents an actress from marrying and being a virtuous woman, as the world understands the phrase ; you have more than one example of such.”

“ Having no mother, no family, nobody to lean on, try as I might I should be a lost creature some day or other. As if I could not see that ! ”

Monsieur de Camors made no reply.

“ Why do you not speak ? ”

“ *Mon Dieu*, mademoiselle, because our ideas on this delicate subject are very different, and because I cannot

change mine and have no desire to change yours. For my own part, I am a heathen."

"What! are good and evil alike to you?"

"No, mademoiselle; but in my mind, evil consists in fearing the opinion of people one despises, in practising what one does not believe, in bending the knee to prejudices and phantoms of whose utter insignificance one is well aware; in being a slave and a hypocrite like more than three-fourths of the world; evil means ugliness, ignorance, stupidity and cowardice. Good means beauty, talent, knowledge and courage. That is the whole story."

"And God?" said she.

He did not reply. She gazed fixedly at him for a moment, unable to meet his eyes, which he kept averted from her. She let her head fall with a sort of discouraged gesture, then abruptly raised it again.

"There are feelings," she said, "which a man cannot understand. I have often dreamed in my hours of bitterness of this independent life that you urge upon me but I have always recoiled in horror from one thought—a simple one."

"What is that?"

"It may be that the feeling is peculiar to me, it may be excessive pride; but I have a great respect for myself, for my person: it is sacred to me, as it were. Even if I believed in nothing, like yourself,—and I am very far from it, thank God!—I should none the less remain

virtuous and pure and loyal to a single love, simply through pride. I should prefer," she added in a low, restrained but impressive voice, "I should prefer to profane an altar rather than myself!"

She rose as she spoke, bowed an adieu with a stately motion of her head, and left the room.

Monsieur de Camors was deeply preoccupied for some time as a result of this interview: he was amazed at the depths he had caught a glimpse of in the girl's character; he was displeased with himself, without just knowing why, and, over and above everything else, he was violently enamored of his cousin. However, as he had a very uncomplimentary idea of a woman's frankness, he became more and more convinced that Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, when she offered him her heart and her hand, was not unaware that he was still a very desirable match for her; he said to himself that, a few years earlier, he might perhaps have been deceived by that hypocritical candor, he congratulated himself that he had not fallen into the alluring snare and that he had been able to overcome his first impulse of credulity and sincere emotion. He might have spared himself those congratulations. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, as he was soon to learn, had been on that occasion, as women sometimes are, perfectly straightforward, disinterested and generous. But would it ever happen to her to be so again, in the future? That was doubtful, thanks to Monsieur de Camors. It not uncommonly happens that by

despising men too much we corrupt them, and that by being too suspicious of women we destroy them.

About an hour later there was a second knock at the door of the library, Camors's heart beat a little faster. He secretly hoped to see Mademoiselle Charlotte again. It was the general who entered.

He walked up to Camors with measured tread, puffing like a porpoise, and seized him by the collar.

"Well, young man?" he said.

"Well, general?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I am at work, general."

"Good!—Sit down!—No, no, sit down!"

Thereupon he threw himself on the divan, just where Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had lately sat, thereby changing the prospect.

"Well?" he repeated, after a long pause.

"What is it, general?"

"What is it! what is it!—why, haven't you noticed that I have been unusually agitated for the past few days?"

"*Mon Dieu!* no, general, I have not noticed it."

"You are not very observing.—I am unusually agitated, anybody can see that! and it goes so far that there are times, on my word of honor, when I am tempted to think that your aunt is right and that there's something the matter with my heart!"

"Nonsense, general, my aunt is dreaming—your pulse is like a child's."

"Do you think so?—However, I have no fear of death; but it's a bore all the same.—Well, as I was saying, I am too excited; there must be an end to it, do you hear?"

"Yes, general; but what can I do?"

"I am going to tell you! You are my cousin, aren't you?"

"I have that honor, general."

"But very distant! I have thirty-six cousins in the same degree with you!—and *sacrebleu*! I owe you nothing, so far as that goes."

"Nor do I ask you for anything, general."

"I know you don't!—As I was saying, you are a very distant cousin of mine; but there's something else. Your father saved my life in the Atlas Mountains. He must have told you about it.—No?—Well, I'm not surprised. Your father was no braggart! He was a man! If he hadn't taken off his epaulets, he had a fine future before him. You hear a great deal about Monsieur Pélissier, Monsieur Canrobert, Monsieur MacMahon, *et cætera*. I say nothing against them: they are intelligent young men—at least I knew them as such; but your father would have gone a devilish long way beyond them, if he had chosen to take the trouble.—But that's not the question!—This is how it happened: we were passing through a gorge in the Atlas range—we were in retreat—I had no command but was serving as a volunteer, never mind why. We were in retreat; a hailstorm of

stones and bullets was falling from the moon, and caused some confusion in the column. I was with the rear guard. Paf! my horse was killed and there was I underneath him. On top of a steep bank fifteen feet high were five brigands, dirty as dish-clouts—I can see them now. They slid down the bank and fell on me and my horse! The gorge made a turn at that point, so that no one saw the fix I was in—or else no one chose to see it, which amounted to the same thing.—I told you that there was some confusion.—Well! I beg you to believe that with my horse and my five Arabs atop of me I was far from comfortable! I was suffocating—I was as uncomfortable as I could be, at all events. Then it was that your father ran up like a good fellow and rescued me. I helped myself a little when I was on my feet; but never mind, one doesn't forget that sort of thing!—Now, let us speak plainly: should you have any great repugnance to enjoying an income of seven hundred thousand francs and calling yourself, after I am dead, Marquis de Campvallon d'Arminges? Answer me."

The young man flushed slightly.

"My name is Camors," he said.

"You are not willing that I should adopt you? You decline to be the heir to my name and my property?"

"Yes, general."

"Shall I give you time for reflection?"

"No, general. I am sincerely flattered and grateful



for your generous plans for me ; but, in questions concerning my honor, I never reflect."

The general puffed noisily like a locomotive letting off steam. He rose, walked around the room two or three times, with his feet turned out and his chest drawn in, then resumed his seat on the divan, which groaned under him.

"What are your plans?" he said.

"I propose, in the first place, general, to try to add to my fortune, which is rather slender. I am not so unacquainted with business as is generally supposed. My father's connections and my own give me a foothold in some great manufacturing and financial undertakings, in which I hope to succeed, with much hard work and earnestness of purpose. At the same time I have some idea of preparing myself for public life, and of aspiring to be a deputy when circumstances permit."

"Good ! very good ! a man ought to do something. Idleness is the mother of all the vices. I love the horse, as you do ; he is a noble animal. I take a keen interest in contests of speed ; they improve the equine race and contribute materially to the better mounting of our cavalry : but sport should be a diversion, not a profession.—Ahem ! so you mean to be a deputy?"

"In due time, general."

"*Parbleu !* of course. But I can be of service to you in that direction. When your heart tells you that the time has come, I will resign, and I will recommend you

to my tried and true constituents, and you shall take my place. Does that suit you?"

"Admirably, general, and I thank you with all my heart; but why resign?"

"Oh! why, why! in the first place to be agreeable and useful to you and secondly because I am beginning to have enough of it, because I should not be sorry, personally, to give the government that little lesson. I hope they will be the better for it. You know me, I am no jacobin; I thought at first things would go all right! but when you see what is going on!"

"What is it that's going on, general?"

"When you see a Tonnelier holding high office, on my word, you would like to have the pen of Tacitus! When I was retired, about forty-eight—it was a shameful wrong they did me,—I was not of the statutory age to be placed in the reserve, and I was still capable of valuable and loyal service. I might perhaps, under ordinary circumstances, have expected some recompense. —I found it, however, in the confidence of my tried and true constituents; but one gets tired of everything, my young friend. The sessions at the Luxembourg, I mean at the Palais-Bourbon, weary me a little. In short, however much I may regret to part from my honorable colleagues and my dear constituents, I will lay aside my functions when you are ready and inclined to assume them. Haven't you some property in the department?"

"Yes, general, an estate that belonged to my mother.

A small manor house with a little land around it, called Reuilly."

"Reuilly!—within two steps of Des Rameures!—splendid! Well, your foot's in the stirrup!"

"Yes, but there's one drawback; I am obliged to sell that estate."

"The deuce! why?"

"It is all I have left, general. It brings in about ten thousand francs. To start myself in business, I must have some capital and I do not wish to borrow."

The general rose, and his martial, measured tread again shook the library floor, after which he dropped once more upon the divan.

"You must not sell your estate," he said. "I owe you nothing, but I am attached to you. You are not willing to be my adopted son; I regret it, but I am compelled to turn to other plans, I warn you that I turn to other plans!—You must not sell your estate, if you are bent upon becoming a deputy. The people in the province, Des Rameures in particular, would have none of you. Meanwhile you need money. Allow me to lend you three hundred thousand francs, you may repay them when you are able, without interest, and if you never return them you will do me a great favor!"

"But really, general—"

"Come, accept—as a kinsman, as a friend, as a friend's son, in whatever capacity you choose,—but accept, or you will wound me deeply."

Monsieur de Camors rose, took the general's hand, pressed it with much emotion, and said abruptly :

"I accept, monsieur ; thanks !"

The general thereupon sprang to his feet like a lion in a rage, with bristling moustache, dilated and smoking nostrils ; he glared at the young count with an expression of downright ferocity, then, suddenly threw his arms about him and embraced him heartily. That done, he walked to the door with his accustomed solemnity, furtively brushed a tear from his cheek with his finger, and left the room.

An excellent man was the general, and, like many excellent men, he had not been happy in this world. People could laugh at his peculiarities, but they could reproach him with no vice. His mind was a little narrow, his heart immense. He was essentially timid, especially with women. He was a man of delicate sensibility, passionate and chaste. He had loved but little and had not been loved at all. He claimed to have been retired unjustly. The facts concerning the injustice done him were these. He had married at forty years of age the daughter of a poor colonel killed in a foreign country. After they had been married some years, that orphan betrayed him, her accomplice being one of his aides-de-camp. The treachery was revealed to him by a young rival, who played on that occasion the infamous rôle of Iago. Monsieur de Campvallon thereupon took off his starred epaulets, and on two successive days, killed the

culprit and the denouncer in two duels, which are still remembered in Africa. His wife died a short time after, and he was left more alone in the world than ever. He was not the man to find consolation in purchasable loves; an obscene jest made him blush. The corps de ballet frightened him. He would never have dared to confess it; but, old as he was, with his bristling moustaches and his awe-inspiring demeanor, his dearest dream was the devoted love of a grisette, at whose feet he could pour out, without shame and, above all, without suspicion, all the affection of his artless, heroic heart.

On the evening of the day which was made noteworthy to Monsieur de Camors by these two interesting episodes, Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles did not appear at dinner. She sent word that she had a very bad sick-headache and begged to be excused. The message was received with a general murmur, and with some sharp words from Madame de la Roche-Jugan, which seemed to mean that Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles was not so situated in the matter of fortune that she could properly indulge in sick-headaches. The dinner was lively, none the less, thanks to Madame Bacquière and Madame Van Cuypp, and to their two husbands also, who had arrived from Paris that evening to pass Sunday with them. In order to celebrate their happy reunion, all four drank oceans of champagne, talking slang the while and mimicking popular actors, to the great amusement of the servants.

When they returned to the salon, Madame Bacquière and Madame Van Cuyp thought it would be most entertaining to take their husband's hats, put their feet in them, and, thus equipped, run a miniature *steeple-chase* from one end of the salon to the other. Meanwhile Madame de la Roche-Jugan was feeling the general's pulse and found it exceedingly irregular.

The next morning, at the breakfast hour, all the general's guests were assembled in that same salon, with the exception of Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, whose sick-headache seemed to be very persistent. They also remarked the absence of the general, who was the personification of promptness and courtesy. They were beginning to be anxious about him, when the folding-doors were suddenly thrown wide open: the general entered, leading Mademoiselle d'Estrelles by the hand. The young woman's eyes were very red and her cheeks very pale. The general was scarlet; he walked forward a few steps like an actor about to make his bow to the audience, cast a withering glance about the room, and uttered an *ahem!* which was echoed by the lower notes of the piano.

"My dear guests and friends," he said in a voice of thunder, "allow me to present to you the Marquise de Campvallon d'Arminges!"

An iceberg in the polar sea is no colder or more silent than the general's salon immediately after that declaration.—Monsieur de Campvallon, still holding Mademoiselle d'Estrelles by the hand, kept his central position,

and continued to dart withering glances at those present ; but his eyes were beginning to wander and to roll convulsively in their orbits, he was himself so astonished and embarrassed by the effect he had produced.

Monsieur de Camors came to his assistance, took his hand and said to him :

“Accept my warmest congratulations, general. I am sincerely happy in your happiness—and she is worthy of you !”

He then stepped to Mademoiselle d’Estrelles’ side, bowed with sober grace and pressed her hand.

When he turned, he was stupefied to see his aunt De la Roche-Jugan in the general’s arms. She passed thence to those of Mademoiselle d’Estrelles, who feared for one instant, from the violence of her endearments, that she had a secret purpose of stifling her.

“General,” said Madame de la Roche-Jugan in a plaintive tone, “I can trust her to you, can I not?—I can surely trust her to you, can I not?—she is my daughter—my second child ! Sigismond, kiss your cousin ! You will allow him to, general ? Ah ! one never knows how dearly one loves the dear creatures until one loses them. I can trust her to you, can I not, general ?”

And Madame de la Roche-Jugan burst into tears.

The general, who was beginning to conceive a high opinion of the countess’s heart, assured her that Mademoiselle d’Estrelles would find in him a friend and a



father. Upon that comforting assurance Madame de la Roche-Jugan took a seat by herself in a corner, behind a curtain, where she could be heard weeping and blowing her nose for more than an hour; for she could eat no breakfast, happiness having taken away her appetite.

When the ice was once broken, everybody put a good face on the matter. The Tonneliers, however, did not overflow so effusively as the tender-hearted countess, and it was easy to see that Madame Bacquière and Madame Van Cuyp did not think without bitterness of the rain of gold and diamonds that was about to fall upon their cousin and adorn her beauty. Monsieur Bacquière and Monsieur Van Cuyp were naturally the first to suffer, and their fascinating wives gave them to understand several times during that day that they despised them. It was a sad Sunday for those gentlemen.

The Tonnelier family felt, moreover, that they had nothing more to scheme for, and they started for Paris the next day, after rather lukewarm parting salutations.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan's conduct was more noble. She declared that she would be a mother to her beloved Charlotte to the foot of the altar and the threshold of the nuptial chamber, that she would be delighted to look after her trousseau, and that the wedding should take place under her roof.

"Deuce take me! my dear countess," said the gen-

eral, enchanted beyond measure, "I must confess one thing—you amaze me ! I have been unjust, cruelly unjust to you ! Yes, on my word ! I am ashamed to say that I thought you were hard-hearted, selfish, deceitful But not at all : you are an excellent woman, a heart of gold, a noble soul. My dear friend, you have found the true way to convert me, as you are bent upon doing it. I have sometimes thought that, so far as religion goes, honor was enough for a man, eh, Camors ? But I am no infidel, my dear countess, and, on my sacred honor, when I see perfect creatures like you, I long to believe all that they believe, if for nothing more than to please them !"

Monsieur de Camors, less ingenuous, asked himself with interest what could be the secret of his aunt's new tactics. It did not require much effort for him to discover. Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had ended by becoming fully persuaded of the general's aneurism, flattered herself that the anxieties of married life would hasten her old friend's end. In any event Monsieur de Campvallou was more than sixty years old ; Charlotte was young, and so was Sigismond. Sigismond would wait a few years, if necessary, and he would gently pay his court to the young marchioness, until the day when he could marry her with all her appurtenances, on the general's tomb. So it was that Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had been crushed for a moment by the unexpected blow that ruined all her hopes, suddenly

modified her plans and shifted her batteries under the enemy's guns, so to speak.—That is what she was dreaming as she wept and blew her nose behind the curtain.

Monsieur de Camors's personal feelings at the news of the projected marriage were not of the most agreeable. In the first place, he was obliged to admit that he had misjudged Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, and that, at the very moment when he accused her of speculating on his little fortune, she was sacrificing the general's seven hundred thousand francs a year. He had an unpleasant consciousness, therefore, that he had not played a very noble part in the affair. In the second place, he realized that he was bound from that moment to stifle the secret passion which that beautiful and puzzling creature aroused in him. Wife or widow of the general, in the present and in the future, it was perfectly clear that Mademoiselle d'Estrelles was entirely beyond his reach ; to seduce the wife of that old man and that friend whose generosity he had accepted, or to marry her some day when she was a rich widow after refusing her hand when she was poor, would be an unworthy or a base act, both of which honor forbade in the same degree and with equal rigor, unless the honor which he had made the sole law of his life was simply a byword and a delusion. Monsieur de Camors did not hesitate to understand it and resign himself to it.

During the four or five days that he passed at Camp

vallon after this incident, his conduct was unexceptionable. The delicate, unobtrusive attentions which he lavished upon Mademoiselle d'Estrelles, combined as they were with a suitable infusion of melancholy, were expressive of his gratitude, his respect and his regret. Monsieur de Campvallon also had occasion to praise the conduct of the young count, who espoused his host's weakness with affectionate good grace, said little to him of his fiancée's beauty and much of her moral qualities, and expressed the utmost confidence in the future of their union.

On the night before his departure, Camors was summoned to the general's study.

"My young friend," said Monsieur de Campvallon, handing him a draft on his banker for three hundred thousand francs, "it is my duty to inform you, in order to set your conscience at rest, that I have informed Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles of the little favor I am doing you. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles has much esteem and regard for you, my young friend, understand that. She received the information therefore with evident pleasure. I have also told her that I do not propose to take any receipt for the money and that no claim is to be made upon you for it at any time. Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles, who, I tell you frankly, will be my sole heir, assented heartily to my intentions in that respect. Now, my dear Camors, do me a slight favor. To tell you plainly what I think, I should be very glad to

see you proceed at once to the execution of your legitimate ambitious projects. My new position, my age, my tastes and those which I assume the marchioness to possess, demand all my leisure time and absolute freedom of action. Consequently I desire to recommend you at the earliest possible moment to my tried and true constituents, not only for the Corps Législatif but for the Conseil Général, which you will do well to take on the way. Why postpone it? You are well-posted, very capable. Very well, then, forward's the word! Let us begin operations! Will you do it?"

"I should have preferred to mature a little, general; but it would be rank folly and ingratitude at the same time not to accede to your kind wishes.—What must I do first? Tell me."

"My young friend, instead of starting for Paris tomorrow, you must start for your estate—Reuilly, I think you said?—You must go to Reuilly and capture Des Rameures."

"What is Des Rameures, general?"

"You don't know Des Rameures!—No, of course you can't know him. The devil! the devil! that's a pity. Des Rameures is omnipotent in the province. He's an original mortal, is Des Rameures, but a good fellow—a very good fellow! You'll see him with his niece, a most estimable woman. Bless me! young man, you must make a good impression on them; your success depends on it. I tell you, Des Rameures is master of the province! He

stood behind me ; except for that I should have fallen by the roadside, on my word of honor ! ”

“ But what must I do to please him, general ? ”

“ Des Rameures ?—Why ! you’ll see him. He’s a great original. He hasn’t been to Paris since 1825 ; he has a horror of Paris and Parisians. Well, you must fall in a little with his ideas on that subject ; a little cunning is necessary in this world, young man ! ”

“ But his niece, general ? ”

“ Ah ! you must please his niece too, deuce take it ! he adores her and she does whatever she pleases with him, although he struggles sometimes.”

“ And what sort of a woman is this niece, general ? ”

“ Oh ! a very respectable woman, perfectly respectable—a widow—rather pious—but very well read ; a very deserving woman ! ”

“ And how must I set about making myself agreeable to her ? ”

“ Ah ! faith, you ask me too much ! I never knew how to please a woman myself, you see. I’m as stupid as a goose with them. They’re too much for me ! But you don’t need to learn anything on that subject, my young comrade—you’ll please her, *pardieu* ! you only have to be polite and respectful—that’s all ! But you’ll see them both, and you will acquit yourself like an angel, I am sure. Make yourself agreeable to Des Rameures and his niece, that’s the watchword ! ”

The next morning Monsieur de Camors left the château

of Campvallou, armed with this incomplete information, and with a letter from the general for Des Rameures in addition. He drove in a hired carriage to his estate of Reuilly, which was six leagues beyond Campvallou. On the way he said to himself, that everything was not rose-colored in the career of worldly ambition, and that it was hard to encounter at the very beginning two characters so disquieting as Des Rameures and his respectable niece.



## IV

The estate of Reuilly consisted of two farms, lost amid the fields, and of a house of some pretensions, in which Monsieur de Camors's mother's family had once lived. He had never seen the property himself. He arrived there about eight o'clock in the evening of a lovely summer day. A long, dark avenue of ancient elms whose branches, dense with foliage, met overhead, led to the dwelling-house, which did not correspond to that imposing prelude. It was an unsubstantial structure of the last century, with attics and a bull's-eye, and flanked by the seignorial dove-cote. It borrowed a certain air of dignity, however, from the two little terraces, one above the other, which came before it, with their double stairways supported upon granite balustrades. Two stone animals, which might perhaps have resembled lions formerly, stood one on each side of the balustrade at the entrance to the upper terrace, and had devoured each other with their eyes for a hundred and fifty years.

Behind the house was the garden, in the centre of which, on a pedestal of solid masonry, stood a melancholy sun-dial, amid flower-beds representing acres of

hearts and aces of clubs; farther on were clumps of box cut in the shape of confessionals, and others in the shape of pawns; at the rear, facing the house, was a wall with benches arrayed against it as in an amphitheatre, suitable for fruit trees; at the right was a quickset hedge, also trimmed in the style of the period; recesses, arbors, and a labyrinth of paths lined with hornbeam, plunging by innumerable detours into a mysterious valley, where one constantly heard a soft, melancholy sound. It came from a terra-cotta nymph, whose urn, by some unknown hydraulic process, discharged night and day a slender stream of water into the basin of a little pond bordered with old fir-trees, in whose shadow it seemed as dark as Acheron.

Monsieur de Camors's first impression of the general aspect of the place was painful beyond words, and the second was still more so. At any other time, doubtless, he would have taken some interest in searching among those souvenirs of the past for the traces of a child who was born there, who had grown to womanhood there, who had been his mother, and who perhaps had tenderly loved all those old things; but in his system there was no room for childish things: he thrust back any such ideas, therefore, if they came to his mind, and after a rapid inspection, he ordered his dinner.

The keeper and his wife, who had been the only occupants of Reuilly for thirty years past, had been advised of his coming, by special messenger, on the preceding

day. They had passed the day cleaning the house and airing it, an operation which resulted in emphasizing all the inconveniences it was intended to prevent, and in irritating the old penates of the house, disturbed in their slumber, their dust and their cobwebs. A vague odor of cellar, tomb, and musty cab seized Camors by the throat when he entered the principal salon, where the table was laid for him. There were two tallow candles on the table, whereat the count, who had never seen any such, was much surprised. Those two candles gleamed dimly in the darkness like two stars of the fifteenth magnitude. Monsieur de Camors lifted one of them by its iron candlestick, and examined it for some time with interest, then he made use of it to scrutinize at close quarters some of his ancestors who adorned the walls and who seemed to regard him with extreme surprise. The cracked and faded paintings afforded glimpses of the canvas in more places than one. Some had lost the nose, others had but one eye, some had hands without arms, others arms without hands; but all were smiling nevertheless with the utmost benevolence. A chevalier of Saint-Louis had received a bayonet thrust in his decoration during the Revolution, and there was still a yawning hole there: but he was smiling like the others and smelling a flower.

Monsieur de Camors, having completed his inspection, said to himself that there was not a single one of the portraits that was worth fifteen francs and sat down with a

sigh in front of the two candles. The keeper's wife had employed a part of the preceding night in slaughtering half of her poultry-yard, and the different products of the massacre appeared upon the table one after another, drowned in floods of butter. Luckily the general had taken the precaution to send a basket of provisions to Reuilly the day before, to tide over the first difficulties of an unexpected visit. A slice or two of game pie and a few glasses of Château-Yquem assisted the young count to contend against the deathly depression which change of scene, solitude, darkness, the smoke of the candles and the ghostly society of his ancestors began to arouse in him. He recovered his mental balance, which he had really lost for an instant, and encouraged the old keeper, who was waiting upon him, to talk. He tried to extract from him some information concerning the interesting personality of Monsieur des Rameures; but the keeper, like all Norman peasants, was convinced that a man who answers a question clearly is a disgraced man. With all possible deference he gave Camors to understand that he was not deceived by his affected ignorance, that monsieur le comte knew much more than himself about Monsieur des Rameures, what he did and where he lived, that monsieur le comte was his master, and, as his master, was entitled to all his respect, but that at the same time monsieur le comte was a Parisian, and that, as Monsieur des Rameures himself said, all Parisians were jokers.

## Part First Chapter III

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*"My dear guests and friends," he said, in a voice of thunder, "allow me to present to you the Marquise de Campvallon d'Arminges."*









Monsieur de Camors, who had sworn never to lose his temper, did not lose his temper. He applied to the general's old brandy for a little patience, lighted a cigar and went out. He stood for some time, with his elbows resting on the little balustrade of the terrace that lay in front of the house, looking out into the darkness. The night, although it was fine and clear, enveloped the surrounding fields with a thick veil. An impressive silence, strange to Parisian ears, prevailed upon the hills and level ground, and in the vast emptiness of the sky. At long intervals a distant bark would suddenly ring out, then die away again, and everything would relapse into silence.

Monsieur de Camors, whose eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, descended the staircase of the terrace and entered the old avenue, which was as dark and solemn as a cathedral at midnight. Having passed through the gate at the end of the avenue, he found himself on a country road which he followed at random. Properly speaking, Camors had never left Paris until this time. Whenever he had gone away from the city, he had carried with him its uproar, its bustle, its round of worldly pleasures and its artificial existence; horse-races, hunting-parties, sojourns at the seashore or at fashionable watering-places had never made him really acquainted either with the provinces or the country districts. Thus he now had a genuine appreciation of them for the first time and it was odious to him. The farther

he walked along that silent road, without lights, without houses, the stronger the impression grew that he was travelling among the dead, desolate regions of the moon. That part of Normandy resembles the most highly cultivated districts in old Bretagne. It has the same rural and somewhat uncivilized aspect, the apple-trees and furze-bushes, the dense woods, the green valleys, the sunken roads, the thick hedges. There are dreamers who love that stern yet attractive nature, even in its nocturnal repose. They love all that at that time was impressed upon Monsieur de Camors's unreceptive senses—the silence and peace of the sleeping countryside, the odor of the grass newly-mown that morning, the little living lights that gleam here and there in the grass by the ditches, the invisible brook that gurgles in the meadow near by, the vague lowing of a dreaming cow—and above it all, the profound tranquillity of the heavens.

Monsieur de Camors walked straight ahead with a sort of desperation, flattering himself doubtless that he should finally reach Boulevard de la Madeleine. He found only a few peasants' hovels scattered along the roadside, whose low, moss-covered roofs seemed to spring from the fruitful soil like huge plants. Two or three of the occupants of these huts were breathing the evening air in their doorways, and Camors could distinguish their awkward figures in the shadow, and their arms and legs distorted by hard work in the fields. They stood there silent and motionless, chewing their cud in the darkness, like tired beasts.

Monsieur de Camors, like all those who are possessed by one dominating idea, had the habit, since he had adopted his father's religion as his rule of life, of adapting all his impressions and all his thoughts thereto. He said to himself at that moment that there was unquestionably a greater gulf between those peasants and a civilized being like himself, than between them and the beasts of the forest, and that reflection confirmed him in the uncompromisingly aristocratic feeling which is one of the logical results of his doctrine.

He had just ascended a steep hill, from the summit of which he looked with disheartened eye upon a new horizon of apple-trees, haystacks and confused verdure, and he was contemplating retracing his steps, when an unexpected incident brought him to a standstill: his ears were suddenly filled with a strange sound. It was a pleasant concert of voices and instruments, which savored of a dream or a miracle in that deserted solitude. The music was good, excellent even; he recognized Bach's *Prelude*, arranged by Gounod. Robinson Crusoe, when he discovered the footprint of a man on the beach of his island, was no more astonished than Monsieur de Camors on discovering such an unmistakable symptom of civilization in the heart of that desert. Making sure of the direction of the melodious sounds he heard, he descended the hill cautiously and with much curiosity, like a king's son in search of an enchanted palace. The palace appeared to him half way down the hill, in the guise of a

high wall which formed the rear of a dwelling that stood with its back to the road. One of the first-floor windows in one side of the house was open, and it was from that window that the billows of melody mingled with waves of light came forth.—A pure, sweet, female voice soared above an accompaniment played by one or more stringed instruments in conjunction with the piano, and sang the mystic words of the young master with an expression and taste that would have given the master himself keen pleasure. Camors was a musician and quite capable of appreciating the scholarly execution of the piece. He was so impressed by it that he felt an irresistible desire to see the performers, and particularly the singer. With that innocent object in view he climbed the inner slope of the ditch that ran by the road and stood on top of the bank ; finding that he was still a goodly number of metres below the lighted window, he did not hesitate to use his gymnastic skill to swing himself into the upper branches of one of the old oaks which grew out of the hedge. While he was climbing up, he did not fail to realize the frivolity of such a performance in a future deputy of the arrondissement, and he could not restrain a smile at the thought of being surprised in that equivocal position by the terrible Des Rameures or his niece.

He succeeded in settling himself comfortably enough on one of the main branches, where the foliage was thickest, and almost opposite the interesting window, and although he was at a respectful distance, he was able to

look into the salon where the concert was in progress. A half score of persons were assembled there, so far as he could see. Several females, of divers ages, were working around a table. Near them was a young man who seemed to be drawing. Two or three other persons were buried in comfortable easy-chairs here and there, with a meditative expression on their faces. Around the piano was a group which particularly attracted the young count's attention. A pretty girl of twelve years or thereabout sat gravely on the piano-stool; behind her was an old man, noticeable by reason of his bald head, his fringe of white hair and his bushy black eyebrows, playing the violin with priestly dignity; a man of fifty or more, in ecclesiastical costume and wearing an enormous pair of spectacles with silver bows, was sitting near him wielding the bow of a violoncello with an air of the most intense interest. Between them was the singer. She was a dark young woman, with pale cheeks, slender and graceful, who seemed to be not more than twenty-five; the somewhat stern outline of her face was brightened by two great black eyes which seemed to grow even greater when she was singing. One of her hands rested on the shoulder of the child who was sitting at the piano, and with it she seemed to be softly beating time, quickening and moderating the child's zeal in turn; and it was a lovely hand. A serenade by Palestrina succeeded the Bach prelude; it was a quartette, in which two new performers lent their assistance. The old priest left his

'cello ; he stood up, removed his spectacles, and his deep bass voice completed a most satisfactory whole.

After the quartette there was a moment of general conversation, during which the singer kissed the little pianiste, who at once left the salon. Thereupon a sort of circle was formed about the priest, who coughed, blew his nose, replaced his silver-bowed spectacles and took from his cassock what seemed to be a manuscript.—The singer meanwhile had walked to the window as if for a breath of air ; she tranquilly opened and shut a fan, and her figure was sharply outlined in the brightly-lighted window. She looked out aimlessly, now toward the sky and again toward the dark fields. Monsieur de Camors fancied that he could hear her soft, regular breathing above the gentle rustling of her fan. He leaned forward slightly, in order to see more clearly and that movement stirred the foliage around him ; the young woman upon hearing that slight sound, stood perfectly still, and the position in which she held her head, stiff and straight, made it clear that her eyes were fixed on the oak in which Monsieur de Camors was hidden. He felt that his situation was becoming serious, and having no means of determining to what extent he was or was not visible, he passed one of the most painful moments of his life under the threat of that obstinate gaze. The young woman turned back at last into the salon and said a few words in a calm tone, which speedily drew two or three others to the window, among whom Monsieur de Camors



recognized the old gentleman with the violin. At that critical moment he could devise no more suitable course than to maintain the silence and immobility of the tomb in his hiding-place. The manner of the people at the window did not fail to reassure him ; they gazed vaguely about in evident uncertainty, and he concluded that he was suspected rather than discovered. They exchanged some animated observations which the young count strained his ears to hear, but without success. At last a loud voice, which he believed to belong to the old gentleman with the violin, uttered distinctly the three words : " Loose the dogs ! " That suggestion seemed to Camors quite sufficient : he was no coward, he would not have yielded a foot of ground to a pack of tigers ; but he would have travelled a hundred leagues on foot to avoid the shadow of ridicule. He took advantage of a lucky moment, when the surveillance of which he was the object seemed to be less active, slid down to the foot of his tree, leaped into the field on the other side of the hedge and climbed a fence into the road a little farther on. He then resumed the unconcerned gait of a wayfarer who feels that he is acting within his rights. He hardly quickened his pace when an instant later he heard a tumultuous barking in the distance, which proved to him that his retreat had been in very truth well-timed.

He found one of the peasants whom he had noticed before, still standing in his doorway, and he stopped in front of him.

"My friend," he said, "whose is that large house yonder with its back turned to the road, where the music is?"

"Perhaps you know well enough!" said the man.

"If I knew, my friend, I should not ask you," rejoined Camors.

The peasant did not reply.—His wife stood beside him. Monsieur de Camors having observed that wives, in all classes of society, generally had more wit and better dispositions than their husbands, tried applying to her.

"My good woman, I am a stranger here, as you see. Whose house is that? Is it Monsieur des Rameures's, by any chance?"

"No, no," said the woman, "indeed it isn't.—Monsieur des Rameures's is farther on—"

"Ah! and who does live there?"

"There, why Monsieur de Tècle—the Comte de Tècle—of course."

"Indeed! And, tell me, he doesn't live alone, does he? There's a lady in his house, the one who sings!—his sister—his wife—what is she?"

"His daughter-in-law, Madame de Tècle, to be sure! Madame Élise, that is."

"Ah yes! I thank you, my dear woman. Have you children? Here's something to buy them some shoes."

He dropped a small gold-piece in the good-natured peasant woman's skirt and walked away.

The road, as he returned, seemed shorter than before and less depressing too. He hummed the Bach prelude as he walked along. The moon had risen and the landscape was the gainer. In fact, when Monsieur de Camors saw, at the end of the still gloomy avenue, his little château rising above its two terraces and bathed in a white light, it seemed to him to present an attractive and cheerful aspect.—However, when he buried himself in the ancient alcove where his maternal ancestors had slept, and breathed the acrid odor of damp paper and decayed wainscoting that formed its atmosphere, he had great need to remember that there was in the neighborhood a young lady who had a pretty face, a pretty voice and a pretty name.

The next morning the Comte de Camors, after a plunge in a tub of cold water, to the profound amazement of the old keeper and his wife, asked to be taken to his two farms. He found the buildings very much like the abodes of beavers, though less comfortable ; but he was surprised to hear his farmers discussing in their patois all the different methods of agriculture and stock-raising, like men who were familiar with all the modern inventions having to do with their trade. The name of Monsieur des Rameures was frequently brought into their talk, in support of their theories and their individual experiences. Such a plough was used by Monsieur des Rameures in preference to all others, such a winnowing-machine was invented by him, such a breed of

animals had been introduced in the province by his efforts. Monsieur des Rameures did this, Monsieur des Rameures did that; they did as he did and found themselves the better for it. Monsieur de Camors realized that the general had not exaggerated the local importance of that personage, and that it was decidedly necessary to come to terms with him. He determined to call upon him during the day.

Meanwhile he breakfasted. That duty to himself performed, the young count leaned on the balustrade looking down his avenue, as he had done the night before, and began to smoke.—It was then midday and yet the silence and solitude seemed to him hardly less absolute, less depressing than on the preceding night when it was quite dark in addition. The cackling of hens, the buzzing of bees, the faint tinkling of a bell in the distance, and that was all. Monsieur de Camors thought of the terrace at his club, the ceaseless hum of the multitude, the rolling of the omnibuses, the theatrical posters, the little kiosks where newspapers are sold, the odor of the heated asphalt, and the least of those enchanting things assumed an unspeakable charm in his thoughts. People who live in Paris have one advantage which they hardly appreciate, except, of course, when they miss it: that is, that a good half of their life is occupied without their troubling themselves about it. The tremendous vitality that always envelops them, relieves them to an extent of which they have no suspicion, of the

necessity of providing personally for their intellectual support. The mere material noises which form a sort of continual bass around them fill the gaps in their thought at need and never leave there the disagreeable feeling of emptiness. There is no Parisian who is not graciously pleased to believe that he makes all the noise he hears, that he writes all the books he reads, edits all the newspapers on which he breakfasts, composes all the pieces of music on which he sups, and invents all the witty remarks he repeats. That flattering delusion vanishes as soon as chance removes him a few kilometres from Rue Vivienne. One thing which happens to him in that experience, confounds him : he is horribly bored. Perhaps he then suspects in the secret depths of his unstrung, nerveless soul that he is a weak, mortal creature ; but no, he returns to Paris, charges himself anew with the collective electricity, recovers his tone, finds that he still has energy, that he is active, bustling, clever, and determines to his own unbounded satisfaction that he has not ceased to be one of the elect—momentarily degraded, it is true, by contact with the inferior creatures who throng the outlying departments.

Monsieur de Camors had within himself, as much as anybody on earth, the means of overcoming ennui ; but in those first hours of provincial life, bereft of his kinsfolk, his horses and his books, far removed from all his habits and all his tastes, he was certain to feel and

he did feel the weight of time with such force as never before. It was therefore a most delicious sensation to him to hear suddenly on the avenue certain high-stepping hoof-beats, which announced at once to his practised ear the approach of blooded horses. The next moment he saw, under the dark arch formed by the trees, two ladies on horseback, riding directly toward his humble château, followed at a suitable distance by a servant with a black cockade. At that charming spectacle, Monsieur de Camors, although greatly surprised, collected his most gentlemanly manners, and even started to descend the stairs from his terrace; but the two ladies, at sight of him, seemed to be at least as surprised as he was himself; they drew rein abruptly, and apparently conferred together; then, having made up their minds, they rode on, across the courtyard at the foot of the terraces, and disappeared in the direction of the little pond that resembled Acheron. As they passed at the foot of the balustrade, Monsieur de Camors raised his hat, and they returned his salutation by a slight inclination of the head. Despite the veils attached to their hats, the count felt sure that he recognized the black-eyed songstress and the little girl at the piano.

After a few moments he called the old keeper.

"Monsieur Léonard," he said, "is my courtyard a public place?"

"Monsieur's courtyard is not a public place, certainly not," said Monsieur Léonard.

"Very good, but in that case, how do you explain the fact that these ladies have just ridden through?"

"*Mon Dieu!* monsieur le comte, it is so long since any of the masters came to Reuilly! Those ladies had no idea they were doing any harm by riding through monsieur le comte's woods.—Sometimes they stop at the château, and my wife gives them milk. But I will tell them that it annoys monsieur le comte—"

"Why, not the least in the world, Monsieur Léonard. Why should it annoy me? I was simply asking for information. But who are the ladies?"

"Oh! ladies sure enough, monsieur le comte. Madame de Tècle and her daughter, Mademoiselle Marie."

"And the lady's husband, Monsieur de Tècle; he doesn't ride, it seems?"

"Ah! no, he doesn't ride, God knows!" said the old keeper, with a sly smile. "It's a long time now that he's been among the dead and gone, poor man! as monsieur le comte well knows."

"Assume that I know it, Monsieur Léonard; but you understand that I have no desire to interfere with the habits of those ladies, don't you?"

Monsieur Léonard seemed satisfied to be well rid of a disagreeable duty, and Monsieur de Camors, having suddenly reflected that his stay at Reuilly would in all probability be a prolonged one, returned to the château, examined the various rooms and busied himself, in con-



junction with the old keeper, in making plans for the most urgent repairs. The little town of L—— was only two leagues away ; everything that was necessary could be obtained there, and Monsieur Léonard was to go there the same day and interview an architect.

Monsieur de Camors set out at the same time to find the abode of Monsieur des Rameures, having finally obtained exact directions. He followed the same road as on the preceding night, passed the monastic-looking house in which Madame de Tècle lived and breathed, cast a glance at the old oak which had served him as an observatory, and discovered, about a kilometre farther on, the little turreted building he was seeking.—It might fairly be compared to the imaginary residences which have set all our readers dreaming in their happy childhood, when they have read beneath a copper-plate engraving the beguiling phrase : *Monsieur de Valmont's château was pleasantly situated on the summit of a pleasant hill.*—There was an attractive prospect of sloping fields, green as emeralds, aye, even greener, and studded here and there with great clumps of trees ; flower-gardens embellished with great urns ; little white bridges spanning small streams ; and, standing in the shade, cows and sheep which might well have figured in an opéra-comique, the coats of the cows were so sleek and shiny and the wool of the sheep so white and foamlike.

Monsieur de Camors passed through a gate, took the first road that came to hand and walked to the summit

of the slope between clumps of trees and flower-beds. An old servant was dozing on a bench in front of the door and smiling in his dreams at all the pretty things about him. Monsieur de Camors roused him and asked for the master of the house. He was at once ushered through a vestibule decorated with stag's antlers into a neat salon, where a young lady in a short skirt and small round hat was busily occupied arranging green branches in porcelain vases.—She turned when she heard the door. It was Madame de Tècle again.

While Monsieur de Camors saluted her with an air of astonishment and uncertainty, she gazed steadfastly and very calmly at him with her great eyes.

"I beg your pardon, madame," he said in a hesitating tone; "I asked for Monsieur des Rameures."

"He is at the farm, monsieur; but he will soon return. Will you take the trouble to wait?"

She pointed to a chair and sat down herself, pushing aside with her little foot the branches with which the floor was strewn.

"But madame," rejoined Monsieur de Camors, "might I not, in Monsieur des Rameures's absence, have the honor of speaking to madame his niece?"

A shadow of a smile passed over Madame de Tècle's serious, lovely, dark features. "His niece? Why, I am his niece," she said.

"O madame, I beg your pardon!—but I was told—I thought—I expected to find an elderly and——"

He was about to say *respectable*; but he checked himself and added :

“And I see that I was wrong.”

Madame de Tècle seemed to be entirely insensible to the compliment.

“May I ask, monsieur,” she said, “whom I have the honor of receiving?”

“Monsieur de Camors.”

“Ah ! *mon Dieu* ! why, in that case, monsieur, I have an apology to make to you. It must have been you whom we saw this morning. We were very presuming, my daughter and I— but we did not know of your arrival—and Reuilly has been unoccupied so long.”

“I trust madame, that you and mademoiselle your daughter will make no change whatever in your habits in the matter of riding.”

Madame de Tècle made a little gesture with her hand as if to say that she certainly was grateful for the invitation, but that she as certainly should not abuse it; then there was a pause, so prolonged that Monsieur de Camors was embarrassed by it. His eyes, as they wandered about the salon, fell upon the piano, and he had upon his lips the original phrase : “You are a musician, madame?” but he remembered his tree and was afraid of betraying himself by the allusion, so he held his peace.

“You come from Paris, monsieur?” said Madame de Tècle.

"No, madame—I have been passing a few weeks with General de Campvallou, who has the honor of being among your friends, I believe, and who strongly urged me to call upon you."

"We shall be very happy, monsieur!—What an excellent man, isn't he?"

"Excellent indeed, madame."

There was another pause.

"*Mon Dieu!* monsieur," said Madame de Tècle, "if a walk in the sun has no terrors for you, suppose we go to meet my uncle; we shall not miss him."

Monsieur de Camors bowed.

Madame de Tècle had risen and rung the bell.

"Is Mademoiselle Marie there?" she asked the servant. "Tell her to put on her hat and come."

Mademoiselle Marie appeared a moment later; she glanced at the stranger with the artless expression of a curious child and bowed slightly, and they all left the salon by a door that opened directly into the park. On that side of the château, as in front, there was a succession of low hills and valleys, carpeted with turf, of thickets and open fields, of little white bridges, sleek cows and curly sheep, stretching away as far as the eye could reach. Madame de Tècle, while answering politely Monsieur de Camors's courteous exclamations of admiration, walked at a light, rapid gait, and her little fairy-like boots left two delicate foot-prints traced on the fine gravel of the paths. She walked with indescribable grace, unaffected

and unconscious. Her gait was stately, flexible, elastic and marked by a sinuous elegance that would have seemed coquettish, if you had not felt that it was entirely natural.

When they reached the wall on the right side of the park she opened a gate, and they found themselves at the beginning of a very narrow road running through a vast field filled with ripe wheat. Madame de Tècle went on, followed by Marie, while Monsieur de Camors brought up the rear. Mademoiselle Marie had shown great dignity thus far ; but when she saw all those waving golden stalks, intermingled with white marguerites, red poppies, and bluebells, and heard the melodious concert made by blue, green, yellow and reddish-brown flies amid all those marvellous things, she became excited and lost something of her stately demeanor. She stopped from moment to moment to pluck a marguerite or a poppy ; it is true that whenever she stopped, she turned to Camors and said : "Excuse me, monsieur !" But her mother was annoyed none the less.

"Come, come, Marie," she said, "come."

At last, as they passed very near one of the apple-trees that were scattered among the grain, the child spied a green branch, surmounted by an apple even greener than the branch and about as large as the end of her finger. That temptation was irresistible.

"Excuse me, monsieur," she said.

And she darted into the wheat, to run to the apple

tree, and, with God's permission, to secure the little apple ; but Madame de Tècle interposed.

"Marie !" she said hastily ; "in the wheat, my child ! are you mad ?"

Marie ran back to the path ; but she could not throw off the fierce longing that had seized her, and she looked up at Monsieur de Camors with an imploring eye :

"Monsieur," she said, pointing to the branch, "please ! —That apple would look so nice in my bouquet."

Monsieur de Camors had only to lean forward a little and stretch out his hand, to detach the branch and with it the apple.

"Thank you ever so much !" said the child tranquilly.

Then she added the twig to her bouquet ; stuck the whole in the ribbon of her hat and walked proudly on with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

As they approached a gate at the farther end of the field, Madame de Tècle suddenly turned.

"My uncle, monsieur !" she said.

Monsieur de Camors raised his head and saw a tall man, who had stopped on the other side of the gate and was gazing at them, holding his hand over his eyes as a shade. His stout legs were encased in deer-skin gaiters with steel buckles. He wore an ample coat of maroon velvet and a soft felt hat. By his white hair and his heavy eyebrows Camors at once recognized the old gentleman who played the violin.

"Monsieur de Camors, uncle," said Madame de Tècle, waving her hand toward the young count.

"Monsieur de Camors!" the old man repeated in a remarkably full, strong voice; "welcome, monsieur."

He opened the gate and offered the young man his brown, hairy hand.

"Monsieur," he continued, "I knew your mother very well indeed, and I am overjoyed to see her son at my house! Your mother was a lovely woman, monsieur, and certainly deserved—"

The old man hesitated and ended his sentence with a sonorous *ahem!* which rang out in his broad chest as beneath the arched roof of a church.

He took the letter from Monsieur de Campvallon which Camors handed him, and, holding it far away from his eyes, began to read it under the shadow of the neighboring hedge. The general had told the young count that he did not deem it good policy to disclose their plans to Monsieur des Rameures at the outset. So that Monsieur des Rameures found in the letter nothing more than a warm recommendation of Monsieur de Camors, and in a postscript the news of his own intended marriage.

"What the devil!" cried Monsieur des Rameures. "Do you hear that, niece? Campvallon is going to be married!"

Tales of marriage have the privilege of awakening the deep interest of the female sex. Madame de Tècle ap-



proached them with an expression of curiosity, and even Mademoiselle Marie pricked up her ears.

"What, uncle, the general? Are you sure?"

"*Pardieu!* of course I am sure, as he tells me so. Do you know his fiancée, Monsieur de Camors?"

"Mademoiselle de Luc d'Estrelles is my cousin, monsieur."

"Indeed! very good, monsieur. And she is a person—of a certain age, I presume?"

"She is twenty-five, monsieur."

Monsieur des Rameures indulged in another of the mighty *ahems!* which were familiar to him.

"And may I ask you, monsieur, without presuming too far, if she is endowed with some physical charms?"

"She is unusually lovely."

"Ahem! Very good, monsieur! It seems to me that the general is a little old for her; but then, everyone knows his own business, monsieur, everyone knows his own business! Ahem!—my dear Élise, when you are ready, we will go back with you. Excuse me, monsieur le comte, if I receive you in this rustic garb; but I am a husbandman, *agricola!* and a shepherd, a simple keeper of flocks, *custos gregis!* as the poet says. Walk in front of me, monsieur, I beg.—Marie, my child, respect my wheat! And may we hope, Monsieur de Camors, that you have the laudable purpose of turning your back on the great Babylon and taking up your abode on your country estate? It would be a good precedent,

monsieur, an excellent precedent ; for to-day, unhappily, we can say more truly than ever with the poet :

‘ Non ullus aratro  
Dignus honors ; squalent abductis arva colonis,  
Et—et—’

Faith, I forget the rest!—Wretched memory! Ah! monsieur, don't grow old!”

“ ‘ Et curvæ rigidum falces conflantur in ensem! ’ ”

said Monsieur de Camors, completing the quotation.

“What! monsieur, you know Virgil! you read the ancient authors! I am delighted! sincerely delighted! That isn't a common failing of the new generation! Ignorant fools industriously spread the idea that it's bad taste to quote the classics. That is not my opinion, monsieur—not in the least. Our fathers used to quote them freely, because they knew them. As for Virgil, monsieur, he is my poet—not that I approve all his agricultural methods. With all the respect I owe him, there is much to be said against his work in that respect; and his methods of stock-raising in particular are altogether inadequate; but otherwise he is divine. Well, Monsieur de Camors, you see my little domain,—*mea paupera regna!*—the wise man's retreat! This is where I live, and live happily, like a patriarch, like an old shepherd of the age of gold, beloved by my neighbors,—which is no simple matter—and venerating the gods, which is much simpler. Yes, monsieur, and, as you

love Virgil, you will excuse me once more—it was for me that he said :

‘Fortunate senex, hic inter flumina nota,  
Et fontes sacros frigus captabis opacum.’

And again, Monsieur de Camors :

‘Fortunatus et ille Deos qui novit agrestes,  
Panaque, Silvanumque senem !—’ ”

“ ‘Nymphasque sorores !’ ” said Camors with a smile, and moving his head slightly toward Madame de Tècle and her daughter, who were walking in front.

“Very good ! very apropos ! that’s the simple truth !” said Monsieur des Rameures in high good-humor. “Did you hear, niece ?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“And did you understand ?”

“No, uncle.”

The old man laughed heartily.

“I don’t believe you, my dear, I don’t believe you ! Don’t you believe a word of it, Monsieur de Camors ! Women have the gift of understanding compliments in all tongues !”

Conversing thus, they had reached the château. They sat down on a bench in front of the salon door, to enjoy the view. Monsieur de Camors praised with discrimination the design of the park and the excellent condition in which it was kept. He accepted an invitation to dinner for the following week, and discreetly withdrew, flattering himself that he had, at the

outset, made some progress in Monsieur des Rameures's esteem, but regretting that he had made none at all, apparently, in the good-will of his light-footed niece.

The fact was directly the opposite.

"That young man," said Monsieur des Rameures, as soon as he was alone with Madame de Tècle, "that young man has a smattering of the classics, and that is something; but he is terribly like his father, who was as vicious as sin itself. He has in his smile and in his eyes some suggestion of his lovely mother; but, take him altogether, my dear Élise, he is the living portrait of his detestable father, whose principles and morals he has also inherited, so they say."

"Who says that, uncle?"

"Why, common rumor, Élise."

"Common rumor, uncle, is sometimes mistaken, and always exaggerates. For my part, I think well of the young man. He is very gentlemanly and very distinguished."

"There you go! there you go! because he compared you to the nymphs of mythology!"

"If he compared me to the nymphs of mythology, he made a mistake; but he didn't say a single word to me in French that was not in the best taste. Aren't you willing to wait until we have an opportunity to pass judgment on him ourselves before condemning him, uncle? That's a habit you have always recommended to me, you know."

"You must agree, niece," rejoined the old man, with some show of testiness, "that the fellow exhales a most noticeable and a most disagreeable Parisian perfume ! Too polished, too self-restrained ! not the shadow of enthusiasm ! no signs of youth, in short ! he doesn't laugh ! I like to see everyone act his age. I like to see a young man laugh till he splits his waistcoat."

"How do you suppose that he can laugh to split his waistcoat, uncle, when his father died so recently and in such a tragic way, and when he himself is half ruined, so they say?"

"Very well, very well !—the truth of the matter is that you are right, and I renounce my prejudice against the young man. If he is half ruined, I will offer him my advice and—and—my purse, if need be, in memory of his mother,—who was like you, Élise, by the way,—and this is the way our quarrels always end, you bad girl. I shout and work myself into a passion and fly out like a Tartar ; you let your sweet temper and your good sense speak, my dear, and the tiger is a lamb. And all the poor devils who come near you have to submit to your fascinating perfidy just as I do. And that is why my old La Fontaine said of you :

On different flowers the bee alights,  
And honey makes of every thing !



## V

Élise de Tècle was at this time approaching thirty years of age; but she seemed younger than she was. She had married her cousin, Roland de Tècle, under strange circumstances, when she was but sixteen. She had been left an orphan at an early age, and had been brought up by her mother's brother, Monsieur des Rameures. Roland lived with his father only a few steps away. Everything tended to bring them together, the wishes of their family, financial considerations, the intimacy due to their proximity and the sympathetic harmony of their characters. They were both attractive children. They had been intended for each other from their cradles. The time fixed for the marriage approached with Élise's sixteenth birthday, and the Comte de Tècle, in anticipation of that event, restored and almost entirely rebuilt one wing of his château, which was set apart for the young couple. Roland himself superintended and urged on the work with the zeal of a lover.—One morning a confused, ominous outcry arose in the courtyard. The Comte de Tècle ran thither and  
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found his son unconscious and covered with blood in the arms of the workmen. He had fallen to the ground from a staging. The poor fellow hovered for two months between life and death. Amid the paroxysms of delirium he called incessantly for his cousin and fiancée, and they were compelled to admit the young girl to the sick room. He recovered gradually; but he was disfigured and terribly crippled.

The first time he was allowed to look at himself in a mirror he swooned, and was thought to be dead. He was a stout-hearted, loyal youth. When he came to himself he wept bitterly—but the tears were powerless to efface the scars from his face—prayed a long while, and shut himself up with his father. As a result of their interview, the father wrote to Monsieur des Rameures and the son to Mademoiselle de Tècle, both being then in Germany. Excitement and fatigue had undermined Élise's health, and her uncle, by the advice of the doctors, had taken her to Ems for the waters. There they received the letters which released her from her pledge and restored her liberty absolutely. Roland and his father asked her simply not to hurry home, it being their purpose to leave the province in a few weeks and take up their abode in Paris. They added that they expected no reply, and that their resolution, being imperatively enjoined upon them by the dictates of simple delicacy, was irrevocable.

They were obeyed. No answer was returned.—Ro-

land, his sacrifice accomplished, seemed calm and resigned ; but he fell into a sort of languor which made alarming progress in a short time, and soon threatened a fatal and speedy end, which indeed he seemed to desire.

They had taken him one evening to the end of his father's garden, to a terrace on which a few lindens were planted. He was gazing fixedly at the purple hues of the sunset through the openings between the trees, and his father was striding back and forth, smiling at him when he passed and wiping away a tear when he was a little distance away. Then it was that Élise de Tècle appeared like an angel from Heaven. She knelt in front of the feeble youth, kissed his hands and told him, enveloping him in the glorious beams of her lovely eyes, that she had never loved him so dearly. He felt that she spoke the truth, and he accepted her devotion. Their marriage was celebrated a short time after.

Madame de Tècle was happy ; but she alone was so. Her husband, despite the tender affection she lavished upon him, despite the true happiness that he could read in her tranquil glance, despite the birth of their daughter, seemed never to be comforted. Indeed he was strangely cold and constrained in his manner with her. Some undivulged sorrow consumed him. She learned his secret on the day he died.

“God bless you, my darling, for all your goodness to me,” he said to his young wife.—“Forgive me for never

having told you how dearly I loved you. With a face like mine one must not talk of love ! And yet my poor heart was full of it. I have suffered much on that account, especially when I remembered what I used to be and how much worthier I was of you. But we shall meet again, sweet, shall we not ? And then I shall be beautiful like you and I can tell you that I adore you.—Adieu ! —I beg you, Élise, do not weep !—I assure you that I am happy. I have opened my heart to you for the first time, because a dying man does not fear ridicule. Adieu ! I love you ! ”

And those loving words were the last.

Madame de Tècle had continued to live with her father-in-law after her husband's death, but she passed a part of the day at her uncle's, and, while attending to her daughter's education with infinite solicitude, she kept house for both the old men, by whom she was equally idolized.

Monsieur de Camors learned a part of these details from the Curé of Reuilly, upon whom he called the following day, and whom he found with his silver-bowed spectacles studying his violoncello. Despite his deliberately adopted system of universal contempt, the young count could not avoid feeling for Madame de Tècle a sort of vague respect, which, however, in no way interfered with the less pure sentiments he was inclined to bestow upon her. Having firmly resolved, if not to seduce her, at all events to make himself agreeable to her and secure her

for an ally, he realized that the undertaking was one of no ordinary difficulty ; but he was courageous and was not afraid of difficulties, especially when they presented themselves in that shape.

His meditations on that text occupied him pleasantly during the rest of the week, while he was superintending his workmen and conferring with the architect. At the same time his horses, his books, his newspapers, his servants arrived one after another and completely banished ennui.

His face wore a very pleasant expression therefore when he alighted from his *dog-cart* on the following Monday in front of Monsieur des Rameures's door, under the eyes of Madame de Tècle herself, who deigned to stroke gently with her white hand the smoking withers of Fitz-Aymon—by Black Prince and Annabel. Camors then met for the first time the Comte de Tècle, who was a gentle-mannered, melancholy, taciturn old man. The curé, the sub-prefect of the arrondissement and his wife, the family doctor, the tax-collector and the schoolmaster completed the list of guests, as they say.

During dinner, Monsieur de Camors, stimulated by the immediate neighborhood of Madame de Tècle, exerted himself to triumph over the secret hostility which a stranger's presence never fails to arouse in the intimate circle upon which he intrudes. His tranquil air of superiority made itself felt at once and even won forgiveness by its very charm. Without exhibiting a gayety

that seemed unsuited to his mourning, he made some amusing remarks and indulged in gleams of humor concerning his early housekeeping troubles at Reuilly, which charmed away his neighbor's gravity. He questioned each of the guests courteously, seemed to be immensely interested in their affairs and did his utmost to put them at their ease. He was artful enough to give Monsieur des Rameures an opportunity for several apt quotations. He talked to him without affectation of artificial meadows and natural meadows, of cows with calf, and cows not with calf, of Dishley sheep, and of a thousand things that he had learned that morning from the *Maison Rustique du XIX. Siècle*. He said little to Madame de Tècle directly; but he did not say a single word in the whole course of the meal that was not intended for her, and, furthermore, he had a caressing and chivalrous way of giving women to understand, even in filling their glass with wine, that he was ready to die for them.

He was generally voted a simple, well-meaning young man, although he was neither. After they had left the table and were standing at the salon windows, in the starlight, enjoying the fresh air, Monsieur des Rameures, whose natural cordiality was heightened a little by the fumes of his excellent cellar, said to him:

"My dear monsieur, you eat well, you talk well, you drink well; I protest, monsieur, that I am quite ready and well disposed to look upon you as an unexception-

able companion and an accomplished neighbor, if you add to all your other good qualities, that of loving music ! Tell us, do you love music ? ”

“ Passionately, monsieur.”

“ Passionately ! bravo ! That’s the way to love whatever you love, monsieur ! Well, I am delighted to hear it ; for we are a parcel of music-mad fanatics here, as you will find out directly. I, myself, monsieur, am fond of fencing with the violin—simply as a country amateur, monsieur—*Orpheus in silvis* ! Pray do not imagine, however, Monsieur de Camors, that our adoration for that noble art absorbs all our faculties and all our time. Indeed it does not, monsieur ! As you will soon discover, if you condescend to take part sometimes, as I trust you will, in our little parties, we despise none of the subjects that deserve to occupy the attention of thinking creatures. We pass from music to literature, to science, even to philosophy, on a pinch ; but, I beg you to believe, monsieur, without pedantry, without laying aside the tone of playful, familiar conversation. We sometimes read poetry, but we never write it. We love the times that have gone by, but we do justice to our own time. We love the ancient writers and we do not fear the modern ; we fear only what narrows the mind and degrades the heart, and our exaltation over everything that seems to us noble, useful and true knows no bounds !—That is what we are, monsieur. We call ourselves the colony of enthusiasts, and the evil-minded people of the province

call us the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Envy, as you know, monsieur, is a plant that does not flourish in the provinces; but here, as an exception to that rule, we have some jealous neighbors; it is a misfortune to them, and that's the whole of it!—And so, monsieur, each of us brings here the tribute of his reading or his reflections—the old book that he keeps under his pillow or his morning newspaper;—we talk about it, comment on it, discuss it and never lose our tempers! Even politics, the mother of discord, has never succeeded in engendering it among us. It's a strange thing, monsieur, for the most contradictory opinions are represented in our little club. I am a legitimist, myself; Durocher here, my physician and friend, is an outspoken republican; Hédouin, the tax-collector, is a partisan of the Parliament; monsieur le sous-préfet is devoted to the government, as his duty requires; the curé is a bit Roman, and I am Gallican, *et sic de cæteris!* But for all that, monsieur, we understand one another wonderfully well, and I will tell you why; it is because we all act in good faith, which is a very rare thing, monsieur; because all opinions are founded on a basis of truth, and because with a few concessions on each side, all honest men come very near having one and the same opinion. What more shall I say, monsieur? the age of gold flourishes in my salon, or rather in my niece's salon; for, if you would know the divinity that presides over our leisure moments, you must look at my niece! It is to please



her, monsieur, to satisfy her good taste, her good sense and her perfect discrimination in everything, that we, one and all, abjure the passion and excess of zeal that spoil the best causes. In a word, monsieur, love, properly so-called, is our common bond and our common virtue, for we are all in love with my niece—I first of all!—then Durocher, for thirty years—then monsieur le sous-préfet, then all these gentlemen,—and you too, curé!—Yes! yes! you, too, are in love with Élise, honestly and honorably, of course, as I am myself, as we all are, and as Monsieur de Camors soon will be, if he is not already. Eh, Monsieur de Camors?”

Monsieur de Camors declared with the smile of a young tiger that he was conscious of a strong propensity to bring Monsieur des Rameures's prophecy to pass; after which, they returned to the salon. The party was increased by several habitués of both sexes, some of whom came in carriages and some on foot from the small town near by or the surrounding country. Monsieur des Rameures soon produced his violin; while he was tuning it, Mademoiselle Marie, who was a thorough musician, took her place at the piano, and her mother stood beside her, ready to beat time on her shoulder.

“This will be nothing new to you, Monsieur de Camors,” said Monsieur des Rameures; “it is simply Schubert's *Serenade*, that's all, monsieur; but we have arranged, or disarranged it a little to suit ourselves; you shall pass judgment on it. My niece sings and the curé

and I play the responses alternately—*Arcades ambo!*—he on his 'cello and I on my Stradivarius. Come, my dear curé, begin—*Incipe, Mopse, prior!*”

Notwithstanding the old gentleman's masterly execution and the scientific performance of the curé, Madame de Tècle seemed to Camors the most remarkable of the three virtuosi. The calmness of her lovely features and her dignified attitude formed what he considered a most seductive contrast to the impassioned accents of her voice. The course of the entertainment soon brought him to the piano, and he executed a difficult accompaniment with genuine talent. He had a pleasant tenor voice too and he used it skilfully. These accomplishments, being exhibited off-hand and without preparation, produced the best possible effect.

He sat apart during the rest of the evening, content to watch and wonder. The whole tone of the little circle was in very truth surprising. It was as far removed from vulgar gossip as from any affectation of sanctity. There was nothing that suggested a porter's lodge, as in some provincial salons; nothing that suggested the greenroom of a disreputable theatre as in many Parisian salons; nor was there anything, as Camors strongly apprehended, that savored of the session of a scientific society. It must be said, however, that the conversation, while it was frequently animated and characterized by outspoken Gallic gayety, never descended to low subjects, and that it was confined by preference to elevated topics, letters, art or

politics ; but those good people had the faculty of touching lightly upon serious subjects and treating the most exalted theme in a simple way. There were five or six women present, some pretty, all with an air of distinction, who had adopted the habit of thinking for themselves without losing their taste for laughter or their desire to be agreeable. All the minds in that interesting group seemed to be on the same level and of the same choice quality, because they lived in the same region and that a lofty one. We must add that they were also under the same charm, and that that charm was irresistible. Madame de Tècle, buried in her armchair and working at her embroidery, apparently indifferent to what was going on, animated them all with a glance or moderated their excitement with a word. The glance was fascinating and the word was always well-timed : such pure minds have no clouds, and no taste could be purer than hers. They awaited her judgment in everything, as that of a respected judge and a beloved woman.

No poetry was read that evening and Monsieur de Camors was not sorry. Between the musical numbers they talked about a new comedy by Augier, a novel by Madame Sand, a recent poem by Tennyson, and American affairs. Then Monsieur des Rameures turned to the curé :

“My dear Mopsus,” he said, “you were just about to read us your sermon on superstition last Thursday, when we were interrupted by that joker who climbed up in a

tree to hear you better.—Now is the time to make up for our disappointment. Sit down there, my dear curé, and we will listen to you.”

The good curé took the designated seat, unrolled his manuscript and began to read his sermon, which we will not reproduce here, notwithstanding the example of our friend Sterne, in order not to mingle the sacred with the profane. Suffice it to say that his aim was to teach the inhabitants of the parish of Reuilly to distinguish acts of faith which elevate the soul and give pleasure to God, from acts of superstition which debase the creature and offend the Creator. The sermon, although written with good taste, seemed better adapted to enforce the evangelical precept than to display the talent of the preacher. It was generally approved. Some persons, however, Monsieur des Rameures among them, criticized certain passages as being beyond the comprehension of the simple minds to which they were addressed; but Madame de Tècle, supported by the republican Durocher, maintained that injustice was done to the popular intelligence, that people often decried it on the pretext of putting themselves on its level, and the criticized passages were retained.

How they passed from the sermon on superstition to the subject of General de Campvallou's marriage, I cannot say; but they finally reached that subject as they were certain to do, for it was the talk of the country for twenty leagues around. That text aroused the wander-

ing attention of Monsieur de Camors, and his interest was excited to the highest point when the sub-prefect hinted, with all proper reserve, that the general, having other cares to occupy him, might well resign his commission as deputy.

“But that would be very embarrassing!” cried Monsieur des Rameures: “who the devil would take his place? I tell you frankly, my dear sub-prefect, that if you propose to inflict upon us some Parisian dandy with a flower in his button-hole, I’ll send him back to his club, flower and button-hole and all! That is one thing that you may look upon as absolutely certain, monsieur!”

“Uncle!” said Madame de Tècle in an undertone, with a glance at Monsieur de Camors.

“I understand you, my dear niece,” rejoined Monsieur des Rameures with a laugh; “but I will beg Monsieur de Camors, who cannot imagine that I have any intention of wounding him, I will beg him to bear with an old man’s mania, and to allow me perfect freedom of speech on the only subject on which I ever lose my head.”

“What subject is that, monsieur?” queried Camors, with his winning smile.

“That subject, monsieur, is the impudent assumption by Paris of supremacy over the rest of France! I haven’t set foot in Paris since 1825, monsieur, because I desire to manifest the horror it inspires in me. You are a well-informed, sensible young man, and, I trust, a good Frenchman. Very well, I ask you, does it seem fair and

right that Paris should send us every morning our ideas ready made, our *bons mots* ready made, our deputies ready made, our revolutions ready made? and that all France should be simply the humble, fawning suburb of its capital? Do me the favor to answer that question, monsieur, I beg !”

“*Mon Dieu !* monsieur, it may be that this matter of centralization is carried to excess in France ; but after all, every civilized country has its capital, and nations, like individuals, must have a head.”

“I seize upon your figure, monsieur, and I turn it against you. Yes, of course, nations, like individuals, must have a head ; but if the head is misshapen and a monstrosity, the symbol of intelligence becomes the symbol of idiocy, and, instead of a man of genius, you have a man afflicted with hydrocephalus.—Take notice, monsieur, of the reply monsieur le sous-préfet will make me directly !—My dear sub-prefect, be frank.—Suppose the deputy’s seat for this arrondissement should become vacant to-morrow, could you find in the arrondissement, or even in the whole department, a man fitted to perform the functions of a deputy even tolerably well ?”

“Faith,” said the sub-prefect, “I can think of no one in the province, and if you persist in refusing the nomination for yourself—”

“I shall persist in it as long as I live, monsieur ! I certainly shall not, at my age, subject myself to the mockery of your Parisian jokers !”

"Very good ; in that case you will be compelled to take a stranger, and very likely a Parisian joker."

"You hear, Monsieur de Camors !" exclaimed Monsieur des Rameures. "There are six hundred thousand people in this department, and in those six hundred thousand there is not the material for one deputy !—I venture to assert, monsieur, that there is no other civilized country in the world where you could find a second example of such a scandalous state of affairs in these days ! That disgrace is reserved for us, and your Paris is the cause of it. It is Paris that absorbs all the blood, all the life, all the thought, all the energy of the country, and leaves only a geographical skeleton in place of a nation ! There are the beneficent results of your *centralization*, monsieur,—as you have chosen to use that word, which is as barbarous as the thing it describes !"

"I beg your pardon, uncle," observed Madame de Tècle, calmly plying her needle, "I know nothing about it myself, but it seems to me that I have heard you say that this centralization that displeases you so was the work of the Revolution and the First Consul. If that is so, why do you blame Monsieur de Camors for it ? That seems to me unjust."

"And to me too, madame," said Camors, bowing to Madame de Tècle.

"And to me too, monsieur," said Monsieur des Rameures with a laugh.

"And yet, madame," continued the young count, "I



deserve that your uncle should call me to account on that subject to some extent; for although I did not invent centralization, as you very justly suggested, I confess that I strongly commend those who did invent it."

"Bravo! so much the better, monsieur!" said the old man, "I like to see a man have an opinion of his own and defend it!"

"I make an exception in your honor in this case, monsieur," said Camors, "for, when I dine out and especially when I have dined well, I am always of my host's opinion; but I have too much respect for you not to venture to disagree with you. It seems to me, then, that the Revolutionary assemblies, and the First Consul after them, were well inspired when they imposed upon France a policy of energetic administrative and political centralization; I believe that such centralization was necessary in order to cast and mould our social structure in its new form, to confine it in its frame, to subject it to its laws, in a word, to establish and maintain that mighty French unity in which our national originality, our genius and our force consist."

"Monsieur speaks the truth!" cried Doctor Durocher.

"*Parbleu!* of course monsieur speaks the truth!" retorted Monsieur de Rameures warmly.—"Yes, monsieur, it is true that the excessive centralization of which I complain had its day of usefulness, of necessity even, I agree; but in what human institution do you claim that the absolute and the everlasting are to be found?"

Great God, monsieur, the feudal system also was in its day a blessing and a step forward ; but may not the thing that was a blessing yesterday be an evil and a danger to-morrow ? May not what we call progress to-day be mere routine and an obstacle to progress a hundred years hence ? Is not that the history of the world ? And if you want to know, monsieur, by what sign you can recognize the fact that a social or political system has had its day, I will tell you : it is when its existence is revealed only by its inconveniences and its abuses ! Then the machine has done its work and must be changed. Well, I say that French centralization has reached that critical period, that fatal point ; that, having been a protection, it is now a means of oppression ; that having given life, it now paralyzes ; that having saved France, it is now killing her ! ”

“ You are getting excited, uncle,” said Madame de Tècle.

“ Yes, niece, I am getting excited ; but I am in the right ! Everything justifies me—the past and the present I am sure of,—the future I fear ! The past, I was saying—Look you, Monsieur de Camors, I am not, I beg you to believe, a narrow-minded admirer of the past ; I am a legitimist in my sympathies, but frankly liberal in my principles—you know that, don’t you, Durocher ?—But there was once, between the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees, a great country that lived, thought, acted, not through its capital only, but for itself. It had a head, no doubt,

but it also had a heart, muscles, nerves and veins,—and blood in those veins, and the head lost nothing by it! There was a France, monsieur! The provinces had an existence of their own, subordinate doubtless, but real, active, independent. Each government, each lieutenancy, each parliamentary centre was a seat of intellectual activity! The great provincial institutions, the local privileges kept men's minds at work everywhere, moulded character and made men!—And mark this, Durocher! If the France of old times had been centralized like the France of to-day, your dear Revolution would never have taken place, do you hear, never! for there would have been no men to lead it. Whence, I ask you, came that extraordinary body of mighty minds all armed for the fray, and of heroic hearts that the great social overturn of '89 suddenly brought to light? Recall the most illustrious names of those days, jurists, orators, soldiers. How many were from Paris? They all came from the provinces, from the fruitful bosom of France!—To-day we need a simple deputy for times of peace, and in six hundred thousand we cannot find him! Why, messieurs? Because, in the soil of uncentralized France, men grew, whereas the soil of centralized France produces only office-holders!"

"God bless you, monsieur!" said the sub-prefect.

"Pardon me, my dear sub-prefect; but you understand that I am pleading your cause as well as my own when I demand more independence, more dignity and

importance for the provinces and for all the functions of provincial life. At the point to which those functions are reduced to-day, in the executive and judicial departments, equally deprived of power, influence and remuneration—you smile, my dear sub-prefect!—they are no longer, as formerly, centres of life, of emulation, of knowledge, schools for good citizens, colleges where men are made; they are simply worn-out machinery!—and so it is with all the rest, Monsieur de Camors! Our municipal institutions are mere child's play, our provincial assemblies a byword, our local privileges nothing at all!—And so not a man—But why do we complain, monsieur? Does not Paris undertake to live and think for us? Does it not condescend to toss us every morning, as the Roman Senate used to toss to the plebs of the city, our sustenance for the day—bread and flattery *panem et circenses*!—Yes, monsieur, such is the present after such a past, such is the France of to-day! A nation of forty million people that wait every morning for the watchword from Paris, to learn whether it is day or night, whether they must laugh or weep! A great people, formerly the noblest and most intellectual on earth, repeating from beginning to end on the same day, at the same hour, in all the salons and on all the street-corners of the Empire, the same obscene jest, hatched the night before in the mire of the boulevard! Well, monsieur, I say that it is degrading, that it makes all Europe, which was jealous of us in the old days, shrug its shoulders, that

it is shameful and ominous, even for your Paris, which is intoxicated by its prosperity, choked by its overflow, and which, permit me to tell you, is becoming, in its haughty isolation and its self-adoration, something like the Chinese Empire, the Middle Empire,—a centre of feverish, corrupt and puerile civilization!—As for the future, monsieur, God forbid that I should despair of it, as my own country is concerned. This century has already seen great things, great marvels—for I beg you to observe once more, monsieur, I am in no sense the enemy of my own times. I admit the Revolution, liberty, equality, the press, railroads, the telegraph. And, as I often say to monsieur le curé, every cause that seeks to live should accommodate itself to the progress of its age, and learn to use it. Every cause that hates its own time, kills itself.—So, monsieur, I hope that this century will see one more grand achievement, and that is the destruction of the Parisian dictatorship and the rehabilitation of provincial life; for, I say again, monsieur, your centralization, which was an excellent remedy, is detestable as a regular diet. It is a terrible instrument of oppression and despotism, ready to any hand, conveniently adapted to all forms of tyranny, and under it France is stifling and pining away. You agree yourself, Durocher, that in that direction the Revolution overstepped its object and even endangered its results; for you, loving liberty as you do, and desiring it not for yourself alone, like some of our friends, but for all the world—you cannot love

centralization : it excludes liberty as certainly as night excludes day !—For my own part, messieurs, I love two things in this world equally, liberty and France. And as truly as I believe in God, I believe that they will both perish in some paroxysm of degradation, if all the nation's life continues to be concentrated at the brain, if the great reform which I demand is not accomplished, if a far-reaching system of local administration, of provincial institutions, independent to a great extent and conformed to the modern spirit, do not provide our exhausted veins with fresh blood and fertilize our impoverished soil. Oh ! the work is difficult and complicated, beyond question: it would demand a firm and resolute hand ; but the hand that accomplishes it will have accomplished the most patriotic task of the age ! Tell that to the sovereign, monsieur le sous-préfet ; tell him that, if he does that, there is one old French heart that will bless him. Tell him that he will have to endure much indignation, much ridicule, much danger perhaps, but that he will have his reward when he sees France, delivered, like Lazarus, from its grave-clothes, rise as one man and salute him ! ”

The old gentleman uttered these last words with extraordinary fire, emotion and dignity. The respectful silence with which they had listened to him continued when he ceased to speak. He seemed embarrassed by it, and, taking Camors by the arm, said to him with a smile :

“ *Semel insanivimus omnes*, my dear monsieur, every-

one to his mania ; I hope that mine has not offended you ? Then prove it, monsieur, by accompanying me on the piano while I play this sixteenth century *chaconne*.

Camors acquitted himself with his usual good grace, and the sixteenth century *chaconne* ended the evening ; but the young count, before taking his leave, found a way of surprising Madame de Tècle beyond measure ; he asked her, in an undertone and with much seriousness of manner, to grant him, at her leisure, a brief private interview. Madame de Tècle opened her eyes to their widest extent, blushed a little and told him that she would be at home the next day at four o'clock.



## VI

Theoretically, Monsieur de Camors was utterly indifferent as to whether France was centralized or not; but practically he much preferred centralization, that being the instinctive preference of an ambitious Parisian. But, notwithstanding that preference, he would have had no scruple about falling in with Monsieur des Rameures's opinions on that subject, had he not felt sure at the outset, with his superior tact, that the proud old man was not one of those who are to be won over by yielding to their judgment. He proposed, however, to afford him the satisfaction of a gradual conversion, if circumstances demanded.

Be that as it may, it was not of centralization or decentralization that the young count proposed to converse with Madame de Tècle, when he called upon her the next day at the hour she had fixed. He found her in the garden, which was, like the house, of an old-fashioned, severely simple, conventual type. A terrace planted with lindens extended along one side of the garden, and was reached by a flight of two or three steps.

Madame de Tècle was seated on the terrace, under a group of lindens forming a sort of arch over her head. The spot was very dear to her ; it reminded her of the evening when her unexpected appearance had caused a flood of celestial joy to overspread the pale, disfigured face of her poor fiancé.

She was sitting by a small rustic table covered with silks and woollens : she was buried in a low armchair, with her feet slightly elevated on a cane-seated stool, and was at work on her embroidery with a great show of tranquillity. Monsieur de Camors, who was even then well versed in the knowledge of all the crafts and elaborate wiles of the feminine mind, and even in divining them, smiled secretly at the expedient of an open-air audience. He thought that he could understand its purpose. Madame de Tècle had desired to deprive their meeting of the character of privacy that closed doors give. That was the exact truth. The young woman, who was one of the noblest creatures of her sex, was not in the least unsophisticated. She had not lived through ten years of youth, beauty and widowhood, without receiving, in more or less direct form, some dozens of declarations which had left her with divers accurate but most unflattering impressions concerning the delicacy and discretion of the other sex. Like all women of her age, she knew the danger, and, like a very small number of them, she did not like it. She had invariably led back into the highway of simple friendship all those

whom she had found prowling about her in forbidden paths ; but the task wearied her. Since the evening before, she had reflected long and seriously concerning the private interview that Monsieur de Camors had surprised her by requesting. What could be the purpose of that mysterious request? In vain did she cudgel her brain, she could not imagine. It was, of course, improbable to the last degree that Monsieur de Camors, at the very beginning of an acquaintance that was hardly formed, could deem himself authorized to declare his passion to her ; and yet the young count's renown as a lady's man recurred to her memory ; she said to herself that a seducer of his stamp might well have extraordinary methods of procedure, and, furthermore, that he might feel at liberty to dispense with much ceremony in dealing with a humble provincial. The result of her reflections was that she determined to receive him in the garden, having observed in her limited experience that the open air and empty space were not favorable to audacious lovers.

Monsieur de Camors saluted Madame de Tècle as the English salute their queen ; then, having taken a chair, he moved it to her side, secretly impelled by the spirit of mischief, perhaps, and said to her, lowering his voice to a confidential tone :

“ Madame, will you allow me to confide a secret to you and to ask your advice? ”

Madame de Tècle raised her shapely head slightly,

fixed upon the count the soft light of her eyes, smiled vaguely, and concluded that questioning pantomime with a slight wave of the hand which signified: "You surprised me beyond measure, but I will listen to you."

"In the first place, madame, this is my secret: I desire to be chosen deputy for this arrondissement."

At that unexpected declaration Madame de Tècle glanced at him again, uttered a feeble sigh of relief and bowed gravely.

"General de Campvallon, madame," continued the young man, "is as kind to me as any father could be. It is his purpose to resign in my favor; he did not conceal from me the fact that the support of monsieur your uncle will be indispensable to the success of my candidacy. I came to the province therefore at the general's suggestion, with the hope of gaining that support; but the ideas and opinions that monsieur your uncle expressed yesterday seem to me so directly opposed to my pretensions that I am distinctly discouraged. In short, madame, in my perplexity I conceived the thought,—most presumptuous, I doubt not,—of appealing to your kindness and of asking your advice, which I am determined to follow, whatever it may be."

"But monsieur, you embarrass me exceedingly," said the young woman, her pretty, perplexed face lighting up with a frank smile.

"I have no special claim upon your kindness, madame—quite the contrary, perhaps; but I am a human

being, after all, and you are charitable. Well, madame, in all sincerity I say that my fortune, my future, my whole destiny are involved in this matter. The opportunity offered me here to enter public life at an early age is unique ; I should be desperately disappointed to lose it. Will you be kind enough, madame, to oblige me with your advice ? ”

“ But how can I ? ” said Madame de Tècle. “ I never meddle in political matters, monsieur. Just what do you ask me to do ? ”

“ In the first place, madame, I ask you, I beg you, not to put any obstacles in my way.”

“ Why should I do that ? ”

“ *Mon Dieu !* you have more right than anyone to be severe. My life has been somewhat dissipated ; my reputation is not very good in some respects, I know ; I have no doubt that it has come to your ears, and I may well fear that it has prejudiced you against me to some extent.”

“ Monsieur, we lead a very retired life here, we hardly know what is going on in Paris.—Nor would the fact you mention prevent my obliging you if I knew how to do it, for I think that serious work of a lofty nature could not fail to be a desirable interruption of your ordinary pursuits.”

“ It is truly a delightful experience,” said the young count to himself, “ to divert one’s self with such a clever person.—Madame,” he rejoined with his graceful ease of

manner, "I share your hopes; but, since you deign to encourage my ambition, do you suppose that I can succeed eventually in overcoming monsieur your uncle's prepossessions? You know him well—what can I do to reconcile him to me? What course must I pursue? for I certainly cannot do without his assistance, and if I must abandon all hope of that, I must abandon my plans."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Madame de Tècle, assuming an air of deep thought, "it is very hard!"

"Is it not, madame?"

There was so much resignation, trustfulness and sincerity in Monsieur de Camors's voice that Madame de Tècle was touched by it, and the devil in the depths of hell danced for joy.

"Let me think a little," she said.

She placed her elbow on the table and rested her head on her hand. Her fingers, separated slightly like the leaves of a fan, half concealed one of her eyes, while her rings flashed in the sunlight and her pearly nails moved softly over the smooth, brown surface of her forehead.—Monsieur de Camors continued to look at her with the same expression of resignation and sincerity.

"Well, monsieur," she said suddenly, with a bright laugh, "for my part, I think that there is nothing better for you to do than to continue."

"I beg your pardon, madame—to continue—what?"

"Why, the system you have followed thus far with my

uncle : to say nothing to him at present, to request the general to say nothing, and to wait quietly until proximity, friendly relations, time—and your good qualities, monsieur, have prepared my uncle sufficiently for the suggestion of your candidacy. So far as I am concerned, my rôle is a very simple one ; I could not assist you openly at this moment without betraying you ; consequently my assistance must be confined, until further orders, to placing your merits in a favorable light in my uncle's eyes. It is for you to exhibit them."

"You overwhelm me, madame," said Monsieur de Camors. "In taking you for the confidante of my ambitious plans, I acted in desperation and in execrable taste, for which a shade of sarcasm is a very slight punishment ; but, to speak with the utmost seriousness, madame, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I was afraid that I might find in you a hostile power, and I find a neutral, almost an ally."

"Oh ! a thorough-going ally, but in secret," laughed Madame de Tècle. "In the first place, I am very glad to oblige you, and then too, I am very fond of Monsieur de Campvallon and very happy to do anything to assist his plans.—*Come here, Mary !*"

These last words, which were spoken in English, were addressed to Mademoiselle Marie, who had just made her appearance on one of the flights of steps leading to the terrace, with flushed cheeks, her hair in a tangle, and a rope in her hand.—She at once went to her mother,



bestowing upon Monsieur de Camors an awkward bow of the variety peculiar to growing girls.

"You will excuse me, Monsieur de Camors!" said Madame de Tècle; and she gave her daughter several orders in English:

"You are too warm, Mary, don't run any more. Tell Rosa to prepare the dress with the small flounces for me. While I am dressing, you can repeat your page of the catechism."

"Yes, mamma."

"Have you written your composition?"

"Yes, mamma.—How do you say *joli* in English—for a man?"

"Why?"

"It's in my composition—for a *beau, joli, distingué* man?"

"*Handsome, nice, charming,*" said the mother.

"Well, mamma, this *gentleman*, our neighbor, is awfully *handsome, nice* and *charming.*"

"*Mad, foolish creature!*" cried Madame de Tècle, while the child made her escape, running down the steps like a cascade.

Monsieur de Camors, who had listened to the dialogue with immovable tranquillity, rose.

"Thanks once more, madame," he said, "and forgive me.—So you will allow me from time to time to confide to you my political perplexities and hopes?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

He bowed and took his leave.—As he passed across the courtyard, he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Marie, and said to her in English with a respectful bow :

“ Another time, Miss Mary, take care ! I understand English perfectly well.”

Miss Mary suddenly stood still, blushed to the roots of her hair and darted at Monsieur de Camors a savage glance of shame and rage combined.

“ *You are not satisfied, Miss Mary ?* ” continued Camors.

“ *Not at all !* ” said the child hastily, in her hoarse, unmusical voice.

Monsieur de Camors laughed, bowed once more and went away, leaving Miss Mary, motionless and indignant, in the middle of the courtyard.

A few minutes later Mademoiselle Marie, weeping bitterly, threw herself into her mother's arms, and told her through her sobs of her cruel misadventure. Madame de Tècle, while seizing the opportunity to give her daughter a lesson in reserve and propriety, was careful not to take the affair too tragically, and seemed to laugh so heartily at it, although she was none too much inclined to laugh, that the child ended by laughing with her.

Monsieur de Camors meanwhile was returning home, congratulating himself cordially on the result of his campaign, which seemed to him, not without reason, a

masterpiece of strategy. By a shrewd mingling of frankness and cunning, he had gently led Madame de Tècle on to espouse his interests, and thenceforth the realization of his dreams seemed to him assured, for he was well aware of the incomparable value of women as accomplices, and he knew the full power of the constant, latent toil, of the accumulated mass of small efforts, of the underground pressure which causes the force exerted by women to resemble the patient, irresistible forces of nature. Furthermore he had shared his secret with that pretty woman, he had so arranged matters that he stood upon a confidential footing with her ; he had acquired the right to mysterious glances, clandestine asides, secret interviews ; and such a condition of affairs, skilfully handled, might well assist him to pass his political apprenticeship pleasantly.

As soon as he returned home, Monsieur de Camors wrote to the general, to render an account of his initial operations and to ask him to have patience for a little while ; and from that day forth he devoted his whole attention to achieving success in the two candidacies which he had entered upon at the same time and which lay almost equally near to his heart. His policy in regard to Monsieur des Rameures was as simple as shrewd ; it was so clearly marked out for him, however, that the details offered but little interest. Availing himself, without noticeable eagerness but with increasing familiarity, of his neighborhood relations, he went to school, so to

speak, at the gentleman-farmer's model farm ; moreover, he yielded to him the theoretical management of his own domain. By his ready complaisance in that respect, embellished as it was by his fascinating courtesy, he made visible progress in the old man's good graces. As he came to know him better, however, and experienced at closer quarters the granite-like firmness of his character, he began to fear that on certain points he would prove to be radically immovable. After some weeks of almost daily intercourse, Monsieur des Ramoures freely extolled his young neighbor as a good fellow, an excellent musician, a pleasant table companion ; but between that point and the thought of making him a deputy there was a gap that might prove an impassable chasm. Madame de Tècle herself greatly feared it and did not conceal her fear from Monsieur de Camors.

The young count, however, was not so disturbed as one might suppose by the obstacles that seemed to threaten him in that direction, for it had happened meanwhile that his secondary ambition had overtopped his primary ambition—in other words, his fancy for Madame de Tècle had become more lively and pressing than his desire to be deputy. We are forced to confess, not to his honor, that he had at first thought of the seduction of his neighbor as a pleasant pastime, an interesting undertaking, and above all, as an exceedingly difficult work of art, which would redound greatly to his

honor in his own eyes. Although he had met few women of her stamp, he judged her accurately enough. He understood that Madame de Tècle was not a virtuous woman simply, that is to say, that duty was with her not a habit only, but a passion; she was not prudish, but she was chaste; she was not sanctimonious, she was pious. He discovered in her a mind that was at once most upright and most acute, sentiments of the utmost elevation and dignity, principles well-matured and deep-rooted, virtue without stiffness, pure and flexible as a flame. But Monsieur de Camors did not despair. It was one of the principles of his creed that there is no infallible virtue save that which has lacked sufficient opportunity, and he flattered himself that, so far as Madame de Tècle was concerned, he was that desirable opportunity. He was perfectly conscious, too, that with her the ordinary methods of love-making would be out of place. With supreme tact he lowered his arms before the foe he wished to vanquish; all his art was put forth to encompass her with absolute respect, leaving the rest to time, daily intimacy and the redoubtable fascination which he well knew that he possessed.

There was to Madame de Tècle something touching in the reserved and almost shy attitude of that scapegrace in her presence. It was the homage of a fallen angel, who seemed ashamed of his fall, in the presence of a spirit of light. Never, either in public or in private, did a gesture, a word or a look escape him at

which the most timid virtue could take fright. More than that: the high-spirited young man, who naturally assumed an ironical tone with all the rest of the world, was perfectly serious with her. As soon as he turned to her, his face, his tone, his words suddenly became as grave as if he had entered a church. He had much wit: he used it and abused it beyond measure in the conversations that were carried on before Madame de Tècle, as if he were setting off fireworks in her honor; then, returning to her, he would suddenly subside and exhibit only the utmost submission and respect.

Every woman who receives from a superior man flattery administered with such excellent taste, does not necessarily love him, but she does necessarily find him very agreeable. In the shelter of the sense of absolute security that Monsieur de Camors was careful not to disturb, Madame de Tècle could not fail to take pleasure in the company of one who was beyond question the most charming man she had ever met, and who, like herself, had a decided taste for art, for social life and for diversions of the mind. In a word, such pleasant and innocent relations with a young man of somewhat scandalous reputation could not fail to arouse in Madame de Tècle's heart a sentiment or rather an illusion, against which the most excellent women find it difficult to defend themselves. Libertines present to ordinary women a species of attraction which it is impossible to describe accurately, but which seems to be a sort of

discreditable curiosity. To women of exceptionable worth they offer another sort of attraction, infinitely more noble but hardly less dangerous: the attraction of conversion. It rarely happens that women do not fall into the capital error of believing that a man loves virtue because he loves them.—Such, briefly summarized, were the secret sympathies, whose slender twigs gradually took root, flourished and interlaced in that heart as tender as it was pure.

Monsieur de Camors had had a vague preconception of it all.—But the one thing that he did not foresee was that he would himself be caught in his own trap, and that he would very soon be sincere in the rôle he had so judiciously adopted. From the very beginning Madame de Tècle had attracted him immensely. The slight suggestion of the Puritan, in conjunction with her natural grace and her worldly refinement, gave her a sort of unique charm, which stirred the young man's surfeited imagination to the quick. If it is a powerful temptation to the angels to save the damned, the damned caress with no less pleasure the thought of destroying the angels. They dream, like the savage biblical epicureans, of mingling earth and Heaven in unknown forms of intoxication. To these deplorably depraved instincts there was soon added, in Monsieur de Camors's feeling toward Madame de Tècle, a sentiment more worthy of her. Seeing her every day in the hazardous intimacy for which life in the country offers such wide opportunity, looking on at the



accomplished young woman's every graceful movement, finding her always even-tempered, always ready for everything, duty and pleasure alike, as vivacious as passion and as serene as virtue, he conceived a veritable adoration of her. It was not respect: in order to respect a person, one must think of that person's efforts and deserts, and Monsieur de Camors did not choose so to think. He believed that Madame de Tècle was born like that; but he admired her as a rare plant, as a charming object, as an exquisite work wherein nature had united all the physical and mental graces with perfect harmony.—In a word, he loved her, and his slave-like manner toward her was not long artificial.

Our readers of the gentle sex will undoubtedly have noticed one curious fact: that, when the mutual sentiments of two weak, mortal creatures have reached a certain degree of maturity, chance never fails to furnish a combination of circumstances that causes the secret of those two hearts to burst its bonds and suddenly sets free the thunderbolt from the clouds that have been slowly gathering. That is the critical period of all love affairs. It came to pass, in the case of Madame de Tècle and Monsieur de Camors, in the guise of one of the most unpoetic incidents imaginable.

It was about the end of October. Camors had gone out in the saddle after dinner for a ride about the neighborhood. It was already quite dark, and cold and unpleasant; but the count was not to see Madame de

Tècle that evening ; he was beginning to find it difficult to do without seeing her, and, being afflicted with the disinclination to work peculiar to lovers, he killed time as best he could. He hoped, too, that the violent exercise would restore a little tranquillity to his mind, which had never perhaps been more deeply stirred. Still young, and with little experience in his pitiless system, his mind was disturbed at the thought of a victim so pure as Madame de Tècle. To ride over the life, the repose, the heart of such a woman, as a horse rides over the grass by the roadside, with no more thought or pity, was a rough beginning. Strange as it may appear, the thought of marrying her came to his mind ; then he said to himself that such weakness would be in direct contravention of his principles, that it would force him to renounce self-mastery forever and would cast him back into the emptiness of his past life. Therefore he must needs seduce her, for he loved her, he desired her, he would have her. He did not doubt that she would yield one day or another ; with the unerring scent of great seducers, he had a vision of impending weakness in that heart when shaken by passion. He saw the hour approaching when he would touch Madame de Tècle's hand with a lover's lips, and a delicious feeling of languor ran through his veins.—As he abandoned himself to these passionate dreams, the memory of young Madame Lescande suddenly came to his mind and he turned pale in the darkness.

At that moment he was riding along the edge of a

small tract of woodland belonging to the Comte de Tècle, a part of which had recently been cleared. It was not chance alone that had led Camors to ride in that direction. Madame de Tècle was very fond of the spot and had taken him there several times, the last time no later than the night before, with her daughter and father-in-law. It was a curious spot. Although but a short distance from the abode of man, the woods were as wild as if they were a thousand leagues from the world. You would have said that it was a bit of virgin forest just attacked by the axe of the pioneer. Enormous uprooted stumps, gigantic tree-trunks were scattered pell-mell over the hill-side and picturesquely obstructed here and there the course of a stream that flowed through the valley. A little farther on, the lofty trees with their dense foliage cast a sort of half-light on the moss, the stones, the underbrush, the rich grass and the patches of slimy water which are the charm and blemish of old neglected forests.

In that solitude, just on the edge of the cleared space, stood a sort of rough hut, which had been built by a poor devil of a clog-maker, whom the Comte de Tècle had permitted to establish himself there so that he might avail himself of the proximity of the beech-trees for use in his humble calling. The gipsy interested Madame de Tècle, perhaps because he had, like Camors, a somewhat unsavory reputation. He lived in his hovel with his wife, who was still attractive under her rags, and two small boys with curly golden hair. He was a stranger in

the province and was supposed not to be his wife's husband. He was a taciturn fellow, whose features, behind his heavy black beard, seemed handsome, forceful and stern. Madame de Tècle enjoyed seeing him work at his wooden shoes; she loved the children, who were as pretty as dirty-faced angels, and she pitied the woman. She cherished a project of marrying her to her husband, if that step needed to be taken, as seemed only too probable.

Monsieur de Camors was riding at a foot pace along a rocky path that followed a winding course up the wooded hillside. It was just at the moment when Madame Lescande's ghost had risen before him, as it were, and when he thought that he could almost hear her lament. Suddenly the illusion gave place to a strange reality. A woman's voice called him distinctly by his name in a tone of distress:

"Monsieur de Camors!"

He drew rein at once, involuntarily, and felt an icy shiver run through his veins. The same voice spoke again and repeated his name. He recognized Madame de Tècle's voice. Casting a rapid glance about in the darkness, he saw a light shining through the foliage in the direction of the cobbler's hut, and following that indication, he urged his horse across the clearing, rode up the slope and soon found himself face to face with Madame de Tècle. She was standing at the door of the hut, bareheaded, with her lovely hair in disorder

under a long, black lace scarf : she was giving a servant some hurried instructions.

As soon as she saw Camors, she ran to him.

"Pray excuse me, monsieur," she said ; "I thought that I recognized you, so I called you. I am so unhappy !"

"So unhappy? "

"This man's two children are dying !—What am I to do, monsieur? Go in, go in, I beg you."

He leaped to the ground, threw his reins to the servant and followed Madame de Tècle into the cabin.

The two golden-haired children were lying side by side on the same wretched bed, motionless, rigid, with staring, wide-open eyes, pupils immeasurably dilated, faces burning hot ; from time to time they moved convulsively. They seemed to be at the point of death. Old Doctor Durocher was leaning over them, watching them intently, with an anxious and apparently despairing gaze. The mother, on her knees, hid her face in her hands and sobbed.—At the foot of the bed the dark-browed father stood with folded arms, dry-eyed ; he shuddered at intervals and muttered in a dazed tone :

"Both ! both !"

Then he resumed his attitude of dull insensibility.

Monsieur Durocher walked hurriedly to meet Camors.

"Monsieur," he said, "what can this mean? I thought at first it was a case of poisoning, but I can find no definite symptoms ; besides, the parents would know

about it and they know nothing.—Sunstroke perhaps !— But how could they both be struck at the same time?— and at this season too ! Ah ! our profession is a hard one sometimes, monsieur ! ”

Camors hurriedly made inquiries.—Some one had come, about an hour before, in search of Monsieur Durocher, who was dining with Madame de Tècle. He had hurried to the hut and had found the children already speechless and in this alarming state of congestion. It seemed that it had come suddenly upon them after a few moments of indisposition and sudden delirium.

Camors had an inspiration. He asked to see the clothes the children had worn during the day. The mother handed them to him. He examined them carefully and called the old physician’s attention to divers reddish spots upon the wretched rags. Monsieur Durocher beat his brow, turned over and over with feverish hand the little cotton shirts and coarse jackets and pulled out a dozen half-crushed pieces of a fruit that resembled cherries.

“Belladonna ! ” he cried. “The idea occurred to me ten times over, but how could I think it was that ? You couldn’t find one plant in twenty leagues. This infernal wood must be the only place—and I did not know it ! ”

“Is there still time ? ” the young count asked in an undertone. “The children seem to be very ill ! ”

“Lost, I am afraid ; but everything depends on the

time that has passed, the quantity they took and the remedies I am able to procure."

The old man consulted hurriedly with Madame de Tècle, who had in her medicine chest neither tartar emetic nor acetate of ammonia nor any of the powerful stimulants which the urgency of the case demanded. They were compelled therefore to be content with essence of coffee, which the servant was instructed to go and prepare in hot haste, and to send to the town for the rest.

"To the town?" said Madame de Tècle. "Why four leagues at night means three hours, four hours perhaps!"

Monsieur de Camors overheard.

"Write your prescription, doctor," he said. "Trilby is at the door and I can do four leagues in an hour with her. I promise to return in an hour."

"Oh! thank you, monsieur!" said Madame de Tècle.

He took the prescription which Monsieur Durocher hastily scrawled on a page from his note-book, leaped upon his horse and rode away. Luckily the high road was near by. When he had reached it, he rode toward the town at the pace of a phantom in a German ballad.

It was nine o'clock when Madame de Tècle watched him ride away; a few moments after ten she heard his horse's step at the foot of the hill and she ran to the door of the hut. The condition of the children seemed to have



grown worse meanwhile ; but the old doctor hoped much from the powerful drugs Camors was bringing. She awaited his coming with feverish impatience and welcomed him as one welcomes a last hope. She contented herself, however, with pressing his hand, when he alighted, breathing hard ; but the adorable creature threw herself upon Trilby, who was covered with foam and smoking like a sweat stove :

"Poor Trilby !" she said, throwing her arms about her, "good Trilby ! dear Trilby ! you are almost dead, aren't you ? But I love you dearly, you know ! Go, Monsieur de Camors, hurry : I will look after Trilby."

And while the young man entered the cabin she confided Trilby to the care of her servant, bidding him take her to the stable and giving him countless minute instructions as to the care and precaution with which she must be treated because of her noble behavior.

Monsieur Durocher had to call upon Camors to assist him to force the new remedies between the tightly closed teeth of the unfortunate children. While they were both engaged in that operation, Madame de Tècle sat on a stool with her head against the wall of the hut. Suddenly Monsieur Durocher looked at her.

"Why, you are ill, my dear lady !" he said. "You have had too much excitement and the odor here is frightful. You must go."

"I do not feel very well," she murmured.

"You must go, and go at once. We will let you know

how we succeed. One of your servants will take you home."

She rose a little unsteadily; but a suppliant glance from the cobbler's young wife detained her. So far as that woman was concerned, Providence would go away when Madame de Tècle went.

"Oh! no, I think I won't go home," she said, in her divine kindness of heart. "I will just go out and take a breath of fresh air. I will stay outside until they are saved, I promise you."

And she went out, smiling.

A few moments later Monsieur Durocher said to Camors:

"My dear monsieur, I thank you. Really I have no further need of your help; do you, too, go and rest. Seriously it is high time; you are turning green."

Camors, exhausted by his rapid ride and suffocated by the atmosphere of the hovel, yielded to the old man's instances, telling him, however, that he would not go far away. As he stepped out of doors, Madame de Tècle, who was sitting in front of the house, rose abruptly and threw over his shoulders one of the cloaks she had brought for herself; then she sat down again without speaking.

"But you cannot stay here all night," said he.

"I should be too nervous at home."

"It's a very cold night. Would you like me to make a fire?"

"If you please," she said.

"Let me see, where can we have our little fire? Not among all these chips; we should have a conflagration to put the finishing touch to our troubles. Can you walk? won't you take my arm? and we will go and find a suitable place for our camp."

She leaned lightly on his arm and walked a few steps with him toward the woods.

"Do you think he will save them?" she asked.

"I hope so. Monsieur Durocher's face is more hopeful."

"How glad I should be!"

They both stumbled over a root and began to laugh like children. After a few steps more, Madame de Tècle said:

"Here we are almost in the woods; I confess that I can go no farther. Good or bad, I choose this place."

They were still near the hut; but the first branches of the aged trees thus far respected by the axe formed a dark dome over their heads. There was a pile of logs near a large rock nearly flush with the ground, and Madame de Tècle took her seat upon it.

"Nothing could be better," said Camors gayly. "I will go and lay in my supplies."

He reappeared after a moment, carrying an armful of white chips and small branches and in addition a travelling rug which one of the servants had handed him. He knelt at the foot of the rock, in front of Madame de Tècle, prepared his kindling and set fire to it with the aid of a

few dry leaves and his smoker's outfit. When the flames darted, crackling gayly, from the centre of that rude hearth, Madame de Tècle started up joyously and put out her hands to the blaze.

"*Dieu !* how good it is !" she said ; "and it's amusing too ; one would say we had been shipwrecked. Now, monsieur, do you want to show me that you are perfect ? Go and ask Durocher what the news is."

He ran to the hut. When he returned he could not refrain from stopping half-way to admire the young woman's graceful, lithe figure outlined against the dark background of the woods, and her fine Arabian face brightly lighted by the gleam of the fire.

"Well ?" she cried, as soon as she saw him.

"There is every hope."

"Ah ! how glad I am, monsieur !"

She pressed his hand.

"Sit down there."

He sat down on the rock, carpeted with grayish moss, and in answer to her hurried questions repeated all the details the doctor had given him and described all the symptoms of belladonna poisoning. She listened at first with deep interest ; and then, having fastened her veil closely about her hair, and leaning her head against the trees behind her, she seemed to find it difficult to resist the influence of fatigue.

"You are quite capable of falling asleep there," he said laughingly.

"Quite capable," she murmured.

She smiled and fell asleep.

Her sleep resembled death, it was so untroubled, her heart-beats were so quiet, her breath so light. Camors had knelt again beside the fire, in order to feed it without making a noise, and was watching her. From time to time he seemed to collect his thoughts and listen, although the silence of the night and the solitude were broken only by the crackling of the burning chips; his eyes followed the flickering reflection of the flame, now upon the white surface of the rock, now under the dark arches of the great trees, as if he wished to fix in his memory all the details of that peaceful scene. Then his glance returned once more to the young woman veiled in her modest grace and her trustful repose.

What thoughts from heaven descended at that moment into that dark mind? What hesitation, what doubts assailed him? What visions of peace, of truth, of virtue and of happiness passed before that storm-ridden brain, and, it may be, forced back the phantoms of black sophisms? He alone knew and he never told.

A sudden sharp, snapping noise in the fire aroused her. She opened her eyes, looked about in surprise and at once asked the young man kneeling in front of her:

"How are they, monsieur?"

He could not decide to tell her that for an hour past he had thought of nobody but her. Monsieur Durocher,

appearing suddenly in the circle of light cast by the little blaze, relieved his embarrassment.

"They are saved, my dear lady," said the old man sharply. "Come quickly and kiss them, and then go home, or I shall have to save you to-morrow. You are really mad to go to sleep at night in a damp wood, and it was foolish of monsieur to allow you to do it."

She laughingly took the old doctor's arm and returned at once to the hut with him. The two children, who had by that time recovered from their ominous torpor, but who seemed to be terrified still by the glimpse of death they had had, tried to raise their little round heads; she motioned to them to lie quiet, leaned over the pillow, smiled in their eyes, and kissed their golden curls.

"Until to-morrow, my angels," she said.

Meanwhile the mother, feverishly excited, laughing and weeping, followed Madame de Tècle step by step, spoke to her, clung to her and kissed her clothes.

"Come, come, let her alone!" cried old Durocher fiercely.—"Away with you, madame!—Monsieur de Camors, take her home!"

She was about to leave the hut when the cobbler, who had said nothing up to that time but had been sitting as if crushed, in a corner of the room, suddenly rose and seized Madame de Tècle's arm. She turned, a little alarmed, for the man's movement was so violent as to be almost threatening. His hollow, tearless eyes were fixed

earnestly upon her and he continued to press her arm in his clenched fingers.

"My friend—" she said, uncertain what to do.

"Yes, your friend," faltered the man in a hollow voice; "yes, madame—yes, your friend—yes, madame——"

He could say no more; his mouth twitched as if in a convulsion; a terrible sob tore his rough breast; he fell on his knees at the young woman's feet and a flood of tears gushed out between his hands, which were clasped over his face.

Madame de Tècle was weeping.

"Take her away, then, monsieur!" cried the doctor.

Camors gently pushed her out of the hut and followed her.

She took his arm and they walked down into the valley to the path leading to the Comte de Tècle's house, which was about twenty minutes' walk.

They passed over about half of that distance before a word was exchanged between them. Once or twice, when a moonbeam pierced the clouds, Camors thought that he saw her wipe away a tear with the end of her glove. He guided her cautiously through the darkness, although the young woman's usual quick pace was hardly slackened thereby. Her active, graceful steps noiselessly crushed the fallen leaves, avoiding without hesitation the ruts and pools, as if she were endowed with supernatural clearness of sight. When two paths diverged and Mon-



sieur de Camors seemed in doubt, she indicated the proper one to take by a slight pressure of his arm.

Both were undoubtedly embarrassed by the silence. Madame de Tècle was the first to break it.

"You have been very kind this evening, monsieur," she said in a low and somewhat uncertain voice.

"I love you so dearly!" said the young man.

He uttered the words in such a heartfelt, passionate tone that Madame de Tècle jumped and stopped short.

"Monsieur de Camors!"

"What, madame?" he asked in a constrained voice.

"*Mon Dieu!*—indeed—nothing!" she replied; "for this is a declaration of friendship, I suppose, and your friendship gives me great pleasure."

He abruptly dropped her arm and said in a hoarse, fierce voice:

"I am not your friend."

"What are you then, monsieur?"

Her voice was calm; but she slowly drew back a few steps and leaned weakly against one of the trees that bordered the path.

The explosion so long restrained burst out at last, and a flood of words poured from the young man's lips with indescribable passion.

"What am I?—I do not know—I no longer know! I no longer know whether I am myself—whether I am good or bad—whether I am awake or dreaming—whether I am dead or alive!—Ah! madame, what I do know is

that I wish that the sun would never rise again, that this night would never end ! That I would like to feel always,—in my head, in my heart, in my whole being—what I feel by your side, because of you, for you !—Would that I could be suddenly stricken with a hopeless disease, in order to be watched over by you like those children, wept over by your eyes, bathed in your tears ! And to see you here, crouching in terror before me ! Why, it is horrible ! In the name of your God—whom you would have me adore !—calm your fears, I pray ! I swear to you that you are sacred to me ! I swear to you that the child in its mother's arms is no safer than you are with me ! ”

“ I am not afraid,” she murmured.

“ Oh ! no—have no fear,” he continued with an accent of infinite gentleness and love. “ It is I who am afraid, I who tremble, for since I have spoken, you see, it is all at an end ! I no longer expect or hope for anything. This night has no possible to-morrow, I know.—Your husband—I should never dare ! Your lover, I would not be ! I ask nothing at your hands, do you understand?—I wish to burn my heart at your feet, as on an altar,—that is all ! Tell me, do you believe me ? Is your mind at rest ? Do you trust me ? Will you listen to me ? Will you allow me to tell you what image of you I shall carry away in the secret depths of my memory, secret forever—dear creature that you are ? Ah ! you know not your own worth and I am afraid to tell you how

great it is, I dread so to take from you one of your charms—one of your virtues. If you were proud of yourself, as you well may be, you would be less perfect for it,—and I should love you less ; and yet I can but tell you how lovable you are—how charming you are ! When you walk, when you speak, when you smile, you are charming ! You only do not know it. You only do not see the gentle flame in your great eyes, the reflection of your heroic soul on your chaste young brow ! Your charm—it is in everything that you do—your slightest movements are instinct with it. You bring a sacred grace to the performance of the most commonplace daily duties—like a young priestess who performs the gracious rites of her priesthood ! Your hands, your touch, your breath, purify everything—the humblest things, the most unworthy creatures—and myself first of all—yes, I myself, who am amazed at the words I utter and the emotions that overwhelm me—I, whom you have made to understand what I had never understood before. Yes, in your presence I understand all the rhapsodies of poets, lovers and martyrs ! They are truth itself ! I can understand how men have died for their faith under torture, because I should like to suffer and die for you ! because I believe in you—because I respect you—I cherish you—I adore you ! ”

He ceased to speak, shuddering with emotion ; then, half prostrate before her, he took the hem of her veil and kissed it.

"Now," he continued, with a sort of grave melancholy, "go, madame. I have forgotten that you were in need of rest—forgive me! Go—I will follow you at a distance until you are safely at home, to protect you; but fear nothing from me."

Madame de Tècle had listened without interrupting, even by a breath, the young man's fiery words. It may be that she then heard for the first time in her life one of those songs of love, one of those ardent hymns of passion which all women secretly long to hear before they die, even though they must die for having heard it.

She remained for another moment without speaking; then, as if waking from a dream, she exclaimed: "*mon Dieu!*" in a voice as soft and faint as a sigh.

After another pause she started forward along the path.

"Give me your arm as far as the house, monsieur," she said.

He obeyed and they resumed their walk toward the house, which soon came in sight. They did not speak a word. But, as she was passing through the gate, Madame de Tècle turned and moved her head slightly in farewell.

Monsieur de Camors bowed and turned away.

He had been perfectly sincere. Genuine passion deals in such surprises, which destroy all plans, break through all logic, falsify all calculations. In them consists its grandeur and its danger as well. It seizes upon you suddenly, as the ancient gods seized upon the proph-

## Part First Chapter VII

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*Her sleep resembled death, it was so untroubled, her heart-beats were so quiet, her breath so light. Camors had knelt again beside the fire, in order to feed it without making a noise, and was watching her.*









etesses on their tripod, and speaks through your mouth. It utters words which you hardly understand ; it contradicts your thoughts, it confounds your reason ; it betrays your secrets. That sublime madness takes possession of you, carries you off your feet, transfigures you ; at one stroke it transforms an ordinary man into a poet, a coward into a hero, an egotist into a martyr and Don Juan himself into an angel of purity.

In a woman, and it is to the honor of the sex, these outbursts and transfigurations of passion may be lasting ; in men they rarely are.—Once borne aloft upon those storm-clouds, women innocently prepare to live their lives there, and the proximity of the lightning disturbs them but little. Passion is their element ; they are at home. There are few women worthy of the name who are not prepared in all sincerity to put into acts all the words that passion causes to gush from their lips. If they speak of flying, they are ready for exile ; if they speak of dying, they are ready for death.—Men have less sequence in their ideas.

Not until the next day, however, did Monsieur de Camors regret his outburst of sincerity ; for, during the rest of the night, still under the influence of his excitement, agitated and exhausted by the visit of the god, beset by a confused, feverish dream, he avoided all reflection ; but when he awoke in the morning, when he reviewed the events of the preceding evening coolly and in the bright light of day, he could not fail to realize

that he had been sadly fooled by his nervous system. Nothing could be more legitimate than to love Madame de Tècle, and he still loved her, for she was perfectly lovable and desirable ; but so to exalt that love or any other as to make it master of his life instead of his plaything, that was one of the weaknesses most sternly forbidden by his principles. In truth, he had talked and acted like a schoolboy in vacation ; he had spouted fine phrases and oaths, and made promises that she had not even asked him to make. Nothing could be more absurd.

Luckily, nothing was lost and there was still time to relegate his love to the subordinate place that such fancies should occupy in a man's life. He had been imprudent ; but his very imprudence might stand him in good stead after all. The net result was a well-worded, spontaneous, natural declaration, which had placed Madame de Tècle under the two-fold charm of mystical adoration, which is always grateful to her sex, and of manly vehemence, which they do not dislike. So there was in reality nothing to regret, although he certainly would have done better, from the standpoint of principle, to proceed with less boyishness.

And now what course should he adopt ? It was very simple. Go to Madame de Tècle, implore her forgiveness, renew his protestations of everlasting respect and finish it.—Wherefore, Monsieur de Camors, about ten o'clock, composed the following note :

"MADAME,

"I am unwilling to go away without saying adieu to you and asking your forgiveness once more. Will you allow me to do so?

"CAMORS."

Having written the note, he was about to send it, when his servant handed him one containing these words :

"I should be happy, monsieur, to see you to-day, about four o'clock.

"ÉLISE DE TÈCLE."

Whereupon Monsieur de Camors threw his own note, which had become unnecessary, into the fire.

Construe it as he would, Madame de Tècle's missive was clearly an indication of the triumph of love and the defeat of virtue ; for, after what had taken place between them the night before, there was but one logical course for unflinching virtue to pursue, and that was never to see him again : to see him was to forgive him, and to forgive him was to give herself to him with more or less circumlocution. Monsieur de Camors did not fail to deplore that his adventure had so speedily degenerated into the commonplace. He indulged in a monologue upon the frailty of women. He was offended with Madame de Tècle for not longer maintaining her position on the imaginary height whereon he had been foolish

enough to place her. Anticipating to some extent the inevitable disenchantment of possession, he already saw her stripped of all prestige, lying with a number on her forehead in the charnel-house of his love trophies.

And yet, when he drew near her home, when he anticipated the charm of her presence, he was disturbed ; some doubts, some anxiety assailed him. When he saw the windows of her room through the trees, his heart leaped so violently, that he stopped and sat down for a moment on the bank.

“I love her like a madman !” he muttered.

Then, springing abruptly to his feet, he exclaimed :

“Nonsense, she’s a woman and that’s the whole story. Forward !”

For the first time Madame de Tècle received him in her room. “She was very tired and not feeling very well,” the servant told him.—The room in question, which Camors had never seen, was very large and high ; the walls were hung with dark stuffs, which made the gold frames, the bronzes, the vases and the old, family gold and silver set out on the furniture resemble church ornaments. In that chaste, almost religious, albeit very sumptuous apartment, there was the vague odor of flowers, of sandal-wood boxes, of scented bureau-drawers and linen, which is the usual atmosphere of women of refinement, but to which each one imparts an indefinable savor of her own personality which forms her own peculiar atmosphere and intoxicates her lovers.—Madame de Tècle,

doubtless feeling somewhat lost in that huge room, had arranged a few favorite pieces of furniture near the fireplace so as to form a little private sanctum which her daughter called—"mamma's chapel."

There it was that Monsieur de Camors found her, sitting in the lamplight upon a couch, and, contrary to her usual custom, having no work in her hands.—She seemed calm: but there were two bluish circles, as if caused by blows, under her eyes. She had evidently suffered much and wept much. When he saw that dear face furrowed and macerated by grief, Monsieur de Camors forgot certain phrases that he had prepared for his entry, he forgot everything, except that he adored her. He walked forward hastily, seized her hand in both of his, and, without speaking, looked questioningly into her eyes with an expression of profound affection and sympathy.

"It is nothing," she said, withdrawing her hand and shaking her head gently; "I am better. I may even be happy, very happy, if you choose."

There was an indefinable something in Madame de Tècle's smile, in her glance, in her tone, which froze Camors's blood: he had a confused feeling that she loved him and that she was lost to him none the less; that he had before him a species of being with which he was not familiar, and that this woman, vanquished, broken, mad with love, loved something in the world more than her love.

She made a slight motion with her hand, which he obeyed like a child, and he sat down in front of her.

"Monsieur," she began, in a voice trembling with emotion, but which gradually became firmer, "I listened to you yesterday a little too patiently perhaps. I ask you now to be as forbearing with me.—You told me that you loved me, monsieur, and I confess to you frankly that I myself feel a very warm liking for you. Under those circumstances, we can only part for ever or be united by some bond worthy of us both. To part would cost me dear, and I believe that it would pain you as well. To be united—As for myself, monsieur, I should be ready to give you my life; but I cannot: I could not marry you without self-evident folly—you are younger than I, and, kind and generous as I believe you to be, common sense tells me that I should lay up bitter repentance for myself. But there is another reason; I do not belong to myself, I owe my life to my daughter, to my family, to my memories: by changing my name for yours, I should wound, I should cruelly grieve all those with whom my life is passed, and those too, I believe, who are no longer alive. Well, monsieur,"—and she smiled with celestial resignation and grace—"I have thought of a way to avoid breaking off relations which are dear to us both—to make them even sweeter and closer. You will be a little surprised at first, but be kind enough to reflect on what I say and not say no at once."

She looked at him and was terrified by his pallor.



"I beg you, monsieur," she said, "I beg you!"

"Say on," he muttered in a hollow voice.

"Monsieur," she continued with her smile of angelic sweetness, "you, thank God! are still young. Men in your position and in our circle do not marry early in life and I think that they are right. Now this is what I propose to do, with your permission. I propose to mingle henceforth in a single affection the two warmest sentiments of my heart. I propose to exert all my powers, all my love and to make it my joy to mould a woman worthy of you, to form a young heart which will make you happy, an elevated and refined mind of which you will be proud. I promise you, monsieur, I swear to you that I will devote to that cherished, consecrated task all that is best in me. I will give to it every day, every moment of my life, as a saint gives hers to assure her salvation, and I swear to you that I shall be very happy. Only tell me that you agree?"

He uttered a vague exclamation of irony and anger.

"You will forgive me, madame," he said, "if such an entire change of sentiment on my part is less rapid than your thought.

She blushed faintly.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she rejoined, still smiling, "I can understand that I must seem to you at this moment a strange sort of mother-in-law; but in a few years, yes, in a very few years, I shall be an old woman, and it will seem perfectly natural to you."

To make her cruel sacrifice complete, the poor woman did not hesitate to cover herself with the sackcloth of old age before the man she loved. Camors, who was a perverted creature but not degraded, suddenly realized how touching that simple heroism was, and he paid it what was in his case the most flattering homage: his eyes became moist. She noticed it for she was greedily watching for the slightest indication of his feelings, and she thereupon continued, almost gayly:

"Just see, monsieur, how well that plan arranges everything. In that way we can continue to meet without danger, as your little fiancée will always be between us. Our feelings will soon be in harmony with our new thoughts; even your plans for the future, which will henceforth be mine, will encounter fewer obstacles—for I can assist them with more courage. Without disclosing to my uncle what must remain a secret between you and myself, I could give him a glimpse of my hopes—and that would almost certainly decide him in your favor. And then, before everything, I tell you again, you will make me happy. Now tell me,—will you accept my maternal affection?"

Monsieur de Camors, with a tremendous effort of his will, had recovered his self-possession.

"Pardon me, madame," he said, smiling in his turn, "but I would like at least to save my honor.—What is it that you ask me? Do you really know? Have you reflected upon it? Can we both, without serious im-

prudence, contract an engagement of so delicate a nature for so long a term?"

"I ask you for no engagement," she replied; "I know that that would be unreasonable. I bind myself alone, so far as I can do so without compromising my daughter's future. I will educate her for you, in the secret depths of my heart she will be destined for you; that is the feeling with which I shall think of you in the future. Give me leave to do it, accept what I propose, like a man of honor, and remain free.—It is a wild scheme perhaps; but I risk nothing but my own peace of mind, and I will willingly run all the risks, because I shall have all the joy. And, then, too, I have a thousand ideas on this subject, which I cannot tell you—which I told God last night. I believe, I am convinced, that my daughter, when I have done with her all that I know I can do, will be an excellent wife for you, that she will make you happy—and do you much honor; and she herself, I trust, will thank me some day with all her heart; for I foresee already what she will be, and what she will love. You cannot know, you cannot even suspect her qualities; but I know her well; there is already a woman in that child, and a charming woman too—more charming than her mother, monsieur, I assure you—"

Madame de Tècle abruptly interrupted herself.

A door opened and Mademoiselle Marie entered the room, holding a huge doll on each arm. Monsieur de

Camors rose and bowed gravely to her, biting his lips to repress a smile, which did not, however, escape Madame de Tècle.

"Marie!" she cried, "really, you are enough to drive one to despair with your dolls!"

"My dolls? Why, I love them!" said Mademoiselle Marie.

"You are absurd; go away!" said the mother.

"Not without kissing you, though!" the child replied.

She placed her two dolls on the carpet, rushed to her mother and kissed her heartily on both cheeks; then she picked up her dolls, saying: "Come, my dears!" and disappeared.

"*Mon Dieu!* monsieur," laughed Madame de Tècle, "that was a disastrous accident; but I persist, and I beg you to trust my word: she will have much good sense, kindness of heart and courage. And now," she added in a serious tone, "take time to think it over and come and bring me your answer, if it is favorable. If it is not, we must say adieu."

"Madame," said Camors, standing before her, "I promise never to say a word to you that a son may not say to his mother—Is that what you wish?"

Madame de Tècle let her lovely eyes rest upon him for a moment with an expression of profound joy and gratitude; then, suddenly covering her face with her hands, she murmured:

"Thanks, I am well content!"

She gave him one of her hands all moist with her tears ; he put his lips to it, bowed gravely and left the room.

If there was a moment in his fatal career when one might venture to admire the young count, that was the moment. His love for Madame de Tècle, strange compound as it was, was immense. It was the only genuine passion he ever felt.

When he saw that love, whose triumph he thought assured, escape him forever, not only was his pride shattered as by a thunderbolt, but he was crushed and torn to the lowest depths of his heart ; but he received the blow like a gentleman. His death agony was sublime. A single bitter word, instantly recalled, betrayed his first anguish. He was pitiless to his grief, as he intended to be to the grief of others. He was guilty of none of the commonplace injustice of rejected lovers. He was able to appreciate the reality, the positiveness, the unchangeableness of Madame de Tècle's resolution, and he was not for one moment tempted to look upon it as one of those equivocal compromises which women sometimes propose and of which men always dispose. He understood that the sanctuary in which she had taken refuge was inviolable. He did not argue or protest : he bowed, and nobly kissed the noble hand that smote him.

As for the miracle of courage, chastity and faith by which Madame de Tècle had transformed and purified

her love, he avoided allowing his thoughts to rest too long upon it. That achievement, which afforded a glimpse, so to speak, of a divine soul laid bare, disarranged his theories. A remark that escaped him while he was walking home may serve to indicate the judgment he passed upon it from his point of view.

"It is child's play," he muttered, "but sublime."

On returning home, Camors found a letter from the general: Monsieur de Campvallou informed him that his marriage to Mademoiselle d'Estrelles would take place a few days later, at Paris, and invited him to be present. The invitations were to be strictly confined to the immediate family. Camors was not sorry to receive the letter, for it afforded a natural excuse for a diversion of which he felt the need: indeed he was strongly tempted to start the same day in order to quiet his suffering; but he overcame that weakness. He passed the next evening at Monsieur des Rameures's, and although his heart was bleeding, he prided himself upon displaying a smooth brow and impassive smile to Madame de Tècle. He announced his proposed absence for a short time, and its cause.

"You will present my compliments to the general, monsieur," said Monsieur des Rameures; "I hope that he will be happy, but I most devilishly doubt it."

"I will tell him of your kind words, monsieur."

"The deuce! *Exceptis excipiendis!*" laughed the old man.

As for Madame de Tècle, it would require a quill cut by her own hands to describe all the imperceptible attentions, the secret graces, the exquisite delicacy and the sweet feminine tact she expended, during that evening, to pour balm upon the wound she had inflicted and glide gently into the maternal rôle she had assumed.

Two days later Monsieur de Camors started for Paris. On the day after his arrival, he called betimes upon the general, who was living in a magnificent mansion on Rue Vanneau. The contract was to be signed that evening and the civil and religious marriage to take place on the following morning.—The general was tremendously excited: Camors found him striding back and forth through the three adjoining salons that formed the ground floor of his abode.

“Aha! there you are! faith, I am not sorry!” cried the general, as soon as he saw the young man, at the same time glancing at him fiercely.

“But general—”

“Well, what is it?—‘but, general!’ Won’t you embrace me?”

“Yes, general.”

“Well, it’s to be to-morrow, you know?”

“Yes, general.”

“‘Yes, general!’ *Sacrebleu!* you’re very calm, aren’t you!—Have you seen her?”

“Not yet, general, I have just arrived.”

“You must go and see her this morning. You owe



her that mark of interest—and then, if you discover anything, you will tell me, won't you?"

"But what could I discover, general?"

"*Bless me!* I don't know! You know women better than I do!—Does she love me or doesn't she? You can imagine that I have no idea of causing her to lose her head over me—but still I should not like to be the object of a feeling of repulsion! Not that I have any reason to think anything of the sort. But the young woman is so reserved, so impenetrable!"

"Mademoiselle d'Estrelles is naturally cold," said Camors.

"Yes," assented the general, "yes, of course,—and, in some respects, I—but, at all events, if you discover anything, I rely on you to let me know. And, by the way, when you have seen her, be good enough to come back here for two minutes, will you? I shall be much obliged."

"Very well, general."

"For my part, I love her like a fool."

"That is quite as it should be, general."

"Hum! you rogue! By the way, what about Des Rameures?"

"I think we have him, general."

"Bravo! we'll talk of that again. Go now, my dear boy."

Camors betook himself to Madame de la Roche-Jugan's abode on Rue Saint-Dominique.

"Is my aunt at home, Joseph?" he asked the servant whom he found in the reception room, very busily occupied with the preparations demanded by the impending event.

"Yes, monsieur le comte, madame la comtesse is at home; you can see her."

"Very good," said Camors; and, taking a corridor which ran the whole length of the suite, he walked toward Madame de la Roche-Jugan's bedroom.

But that bedroom was no longer Madame de la Roche-Jugan's. That worthy creature had insisted upon giving it up to Mademoiselle Charlotte, to whom she had manifested the most servile deference since she had known that she was betrothed to the general's seven hundred thousand a year. Mademoiselle d'Estrelles had accepted that arrangement with scornful indifference. Camors, who knew nothing of the change, knocked innocently enough at Mademoiselle d'Estrelles's door.

Obtaining no reply, he entered hesitatingly, raised the portière and paused abruptly, confronted by a strange spectacle. At the other end of the room, and facing him, was a large toilet mirror, in front of which Mademoiselle d'Estrelles was standing, her back being thus turned to him. She was dressed, or rather draped, in a sort of white cashmere *peignoir* without sleeves, which left her shoulders and arms bare; her hair, which was of an ashen shade, was loose and floating, and fell in silky waves to the carpet. She was resting one hand lightly

on the toilet table, and with the other holding the folds of her *peignoir* over her breast ;—she was looking in the glass and weeping. Her tears were falling drop by drop from her limpid eyes upon her pure, white bosom and glistened there like the drops of dew we see glistening in the morning, in gardens, on the shoulders of marble nymphs.—Monsieur de Camors softly let the portière fall and at once withdrew, carrying with him however a never-dying memory of that brief visit.

He made inquiries and was enabled at last to receive the embraces of his aunt, who had taken refuge in her son's room, he having been relegated to the small chamber occupied by Mademoiselle d'Estrelles in other days.—Madame de la Roche-Jugan, after her first effusive greeting, led her nephew to the salon, where the wedding gifts were displayed in all their glory. Valuable cashmeres, laces, velvets and silks lay about on all the furniture ; open jewel-cases sparkled on mantelpiece, tables and consoles.

While Madame de la Roche-Jugan was displaying these magnificent things to Camors, taking pains to estimate the price of each, Mademoiselle Charlotte, who had been informed of the young count's presence, entered the salon. Her face was not only serene but beaming.

"Good-morning, cousin," she said brightly, giving Camors her hand. "How kind of you to have come ! You see how the general is spoiling me !"

"It is a princess's trousseau, mademoiselle."

"And if you knew, Louis, how becoming everything is to her, dear child!" said Madame de la Roche-Jugan. "One would say that she was really born on a throne. Indeed, you know she is descended from the kings of Arragon?"

"Dear aunt!" said Charlotte, kissing her on the forehead.

"You know, Louis, I insist on her calling me aunt, now," said the countess, adopting the plaintive tone which seemed to her expressive of the highest degree of human affection.

"Ah!" said Camors.

"Come, dear child, just try on your coronet for your cousin, I beg you."

"I wish you would, cousin."

"Your slightest wishes are commands to me, cousin," said Mademoiselle Charlotte, her melodious, grave voice taking on a slightly satirical tone.

Among the treasures with which the salon was filled to overflowing was a full marchioness's coronet, set with precious stones and clusters of pearls. The girl adjusted it on her head before the mirror.

"There it is," she said, taking her stand two steps from Camors, with her calm, majestic bearing.

As he gazed at her, almost dazzled, for she was marvelously stately and beautiful beneath that bauble, she suddenly fixed her eyes upon his and, lowering her voice, said in a tone of indescribable bitterness:

"At all events I am selling myself very dear. am I not ? "

Thereupon she turned her back upon him, took off her coronet and began to laugh.

After a few indifferent words Camors took his leave, saying to himself that that estimable young woman was in a fair way to become a terrible young woman, but not saying to himself that he was in any way responsible therefor.

He returned at once to the general, in fulfilment of his promise, and found him still pacing the three salons.

"Well?" he cried, as soon as he caught sight of him.

"Well, general—she is perfect !—all goes well ! "

"Pshaw !—did you see her ? "

"Yes, to be sure."

"And she told you—?"

"Not much of anything ; but she seems to be enchanted."

"Seriously, didn't you notice anything ? "

"I noticed that she was extremely pretty."

"*Parbleu !* And do you think she loves me a little ? "

"Most certainly—in her way—as much as she can love, for she is naturally cold."

"Oh ! as for that, I can stand it, you know. All that I want is not to be disagreeable to her. You don't think I am, eh ?—Bravo ! you give me the greatest pleasure. Now, follow your own bent, my dear boy—until this evening."

“Until this evening, general.”

The ceremony of signing the contract presented no noteworthy incident. But, when the notary read in smooth tones the clause whereby the general constituted Mademoiselle d'Estrelles heir to all his property, Camors was entertained to observe that young woman's superb impassibility, the smiling exasperation of Mesdames Bacquière and Van Cuyp and the doting glance with which Madame de la Roche-Jugan embraced her son Sigismond, Mademoiselle d'Estrelles and the notary simultaneously. From them the countess's eye passed to the general with an expression of the liveliest interest and she seemed pleased to discover that he looked very ill.

The next day, after leaving the church of Saint-Thomas d'Aquin, the young marchioness simply changed her bridal gown for a travelling costume, and started at once with her husband for Campvallou, drowned in the tears of Madame de la Roche-Jugan, whose lachrymal glands were exceedingly tender and obedient.

A week later Monsieur de Camors himself returned to Reuilly. Paris had retempered him, his nerves had recovered their tone. Thenceforth, he took a healthier view,—the view of a practical man,—of his adventure with Madame de Tècle, and he began to congratulate himself on the way it had ended. If it had taken a different turn, his whole future might have been involved in it and compromised by it. His political future in particular would probably have been destroyed or indefinitely

postponed, for his liaison with Madame de Tècle would inevitably have become known one day or another and have alienated Monsieur des Rameures's good will forever. Upon that point he was entirely right. In the first interview he had with her, Madame de Tècle confided to him that her uncle had seemed to be relieved of a great weight when she laughingly suggested to him the idea of marrying her daughter some day to Monsieur de Camors. Camors seized the opportunity to remind Madame de Tècle that, while he had the utmost respect for the plans she had done him the honor to form for his future, he in no wise bound himself to carry them out, and that common sense and loyalty to her alike enjoined upon him to retain absolute freedom of action in that regard. She assented once more with her customary gentleness and from that moment, although she constantly manifested the same affectionate liking for him, she never permitted herself the shade of an allusion to the dream she cherished so fondly. Her love for her daughter, however, seemed to grow even greater, and she devoted herself to her education with a renewed fervor which would have touched Monsieur de Camors's heart, had not Monsieur de Camors's heart seemed to lose in its last virtuous effort all the human quality it still retained.

His honor being shielded by his frank understanding with Madame de Tècle, he no longer hesitated to avail himself to the utmost of the advantages of his situation. He allowed his interests to be served by Madame de



Tècle, therefore, as far as she chose to serve them, and she was passionately bent upon doing her utmost. She succeeded gradually in convincing her uncle Des Rameures that Monsieur de Camors was destined, by his character and his talents, to have a great future, that he would make an excellent husband for Mademoiselle Marie some day, that he would become more and more interested in the province and in agriculture, that he would even become a convert to the policy of decentralization, —in short, that he must be attached by the strongest possible bonds to a province whose honor he would be.

At that juncture General de Campvallou brought the young marchioness to call upon Madame de Tècle ; in a confidential interview with Monsieur des Rameures he at last unmasked his batteries. He was on the point of starting for Italy, where he proposed to make a long stay ; but he desired first to hand in his resignation as a member of the Conseil Général and the Corps Législatif and to recommend Camors to his tried and true constituents. Monsieur des Rameures, won over in advance, promised his assistance, and that assistance was equivalent to success. Monsieur de Camors was advised, however, to make some overtures personally to the most influential electors ; but his manner was as captivating as it was redoubtable, and he was one of those who carry a heart or a vote by a smile. Lastly, to comply with all the requirements, he took up his abode for a few weeks at —, the chief town of the department. He paid his

court to the prefect's wife, to a sufficient degree to flatter the official, but not to alarm the husband. The prefect advised the minister that Monsieur de Camors was put forward as a candidate with an irresistible backing, that the young count's political leanings seemed to be uncertain, a little suspicious even, but that the department officials, having no hope of opposing him successfully, deemed it judicious to support him. The minister, whose judgment was no less acute than the prefect's, was of the same opinion. By virtue of all these circumstances, Monsieur de Camors, toward the end of his twenty-eighth year, was chosen a member of the Conseil Général, and, a few days later, a deputy to the Corps Législatif.

"You would have it so, niece," said Monsieur des Rameures, when he learned of that twofold result, "you would have it so, and I supported that young Parisian with all my influence ; but, do what I will, he has not my confidence ! May we never have reason to regret our triumph, my dear Élise ! May we never be able to say with the poet : '*Numinibus vota exaudita malignis !*' Unfriendly gods granted our prayers !"

## PART SECOND



## PART SECOND

### I

As we enter upon the second part of this truthful narrative, we feel called upon to address a request to our readers, especially to those of the gentler sex: we beg them not to take offence if the truth, as they rub elbows with it every day in society, appears to them in these pages in colors that are somewhat vivid, although softened. We must love the truth, veil it if you will, but not emasculate it. The ideal itself is simply truth arrayed in the forms of art. The novelist knows that he has no right to slander his time; but he has the right to describe it or else he has no rights at all. As for his duty, he believes that he knows what it is: it is to keep his judgment unflinching and his pen unsullied throughout the most hazardous pictures of manners and morals. He hopes not to fail in that duty. This said, he resumes his narrative.

Five years had passed since the electors of the arron-  
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dissement of Reuilly sent the Comte de Camors to the Corps Législatif, and they did not repent their action. Their deputy was wonderfully well informed as to their petty local interests and lost no opportunity to forward them. Furthermore, if any of his worthy constituents, having occasion to visit Paris, called at the little house he had had built on Avenue de l'Impératrice by an architect named Lescande—Monsieur de Camors had seized the opportunity to pay his old friend a delicate attention—they were received with such charming affability that they returned to the province touched to the heart. Monsieur de Camors would condescend to inquire if their wives or daughters had accompanied them on their little trip; he would give them tickets to the theatre and cards of admission to the Chamber; he would show them his pictures and his stables. He would even have his horses trotted around the stable yard under their eyes. The good people thought and repeated with deep feeling throughout the arrondissement that his manner was less melancholy than it used to be, that his face had improved a great deal. His courtesy, which was formerly somewhat stiff, had acquired flexibility without losing anything in dignity; his face, formerly a little gloomy, was marked by a serenity at once smiling and serious. He had a sort of royal charm. He showed to all women alike, young or old, rich or poor, virtuous or not, the historical courtesy of Louis XIV. With his inferiors no less than with his equals, his manner was delightful in its urbanity;

—for in his heart he had the same contempt for women, for his inferiors, for his equals, and for his constituents.

He loved, esteemed, respected no one but himself ; but he loved, esteemed and respected himself as a god. He had succeeded, in very truth, in realizing as completely as possible in his person the almost superhuman type he had put before himself at the critical moment of his life, and, when he contemplated himself from top to toe in the always ideal mirror that he held before his eyes, he was content. He was what he wanted to be, and the programme of his life, as he had arranged it, was faithfully carried out. By constantly exerting his powerful will, he had succeeded in subduing in himself as well as despising in others all the instinctive feelings of which the ordinary mortal is the plaything, and which in his view, denoted simply subordination of the animal nature, or were mere conventional fetters that bind the weak but are broken by the strong. He made it a part of his daily duty to develop to the utmost perfection the physical gifts and intellectual faculties which he owed to chance, in order to extract therefrom the greatest possible amount of enjoyment in his brief journey from the cradle to the grave. Lastly, being fully persuaded that exquisite manners, delicacy of taste, external elegance and the most refined sense of honor constitute a sort of moral beauty which makes the perfect gentleman, he strove to embellish his person with those light and airy final charms, like a con-



scientious artist who wishes to leave no detail of his work incomplete.

The result of these efforts, put forth upon himself with much persistence and success, was that Monsieur de Camors, at the moment when we renew his acquaintance, was not perhaps the best man in the world, but he was in all probability the most attractive and the happiest. Like all those who have made up their minds to excel in merit rather than in scrupulousness, he found that everything succeeded with him as well as he could wish. Sure thenceforth of the future, he discounted it boldly, and lived like a man of large means. His rapid rise in fortune was explained by his amazing audacity, by the shrewdness and accuracy of his judgment, by his distinguished connections and also by his moral independence. There was a favorite saying of his, savage in its cynicism, which he uttered, however, with all imaginable sweetness: "Mankind is composed of shareholders." Deeply imbued with that maxim, he had rapidly taken all the degrees in the free-masonry of exalted financial corruption. He was distinguished in that sphere by the seductive influence of his personality. He knew how to make the most of his name, his political position, his reputation as a man of honor, using them all and endangering none of them. He captured men, some by their vices, others by their virtues, with equal indifference. He was incapable of a base action. He had never wittingly led a friend or even a foe into a

disastrous speculation. It sometimes happened, however, that, if an affair turned out badly, he would step out in time and others would stay in ; but, in financial speculations as in battles, there is what is called *chair à canon*,<sup>2</sup> and he who should pay too much attention to it would do nothing great. Such as he was, he was rightly esteemed to be one of the most upright of his kind, and his word was as good as his bond in the business world as well as in the purer regions of the club and sport.

He was no less esteemed in the Corps Législatif. He had adopted an original rôle there, that of a hardworking member. The working committees fought for him. The Chamber was infinitely grateful to the exquisite young man for his modest capacity for toil. They were astonished to find him prepared to discuss the driest questions, the most uninteresting reports. Proposed laws of local interest only had no terrors and no mysteries for him. He never spoke at the regular sessions ; but his voice was heard in the penumbra of the committee-room ; his clear, sober, slightly sarcastic style came more and more into notice. No one doubted that he would be one of the great statesmen of the future ; but it was felt that he was holding himself back. His political faith remained somewhat obscure. He sat in the Left Centre, courteous to everybody, cold to everybody. Convinced, like his father before him, that the rising generation would, after the usual interval had elapsed, indulge in the caprice of a revo-

lution, he took pleasure in reckoning that that periodical catastrophe would probably come to pass as he reached his fortieth year; and that it would lay open to his blasé maturity a well-spring of fresh emotions and determine his political principles in accordance with the course of events. His life meanwhile was so agreeable that he could await without impatience the hour when his ambition would be realized. Respected, feared and envied by the men, he was idolized by the women. His presence, which was not freely accorded, gave lustre to a salon. His intrigues could not be counted because they were at once very numerous and very quiet. His passions were most ephemeral.—Love affairs in which there is no suggestion of aught save material passion, are not of long duration.—But he thought that he owed it to himself to do honor to his victims, and he buried them with delicacy under the flowers of friendship. In that way he had made a great number of friends among the society women of Paris, some of whom simply detested him. As for the husbands, they all liked him. In addition to these refined pleasures, he indulged in an occasional wild debauch, whose magnificence tempted for the moment his blunted imagination; but low company was repellent to him and he never resorted to it. He was no reveller. He was sparing of the hours meant for sleep, and careful of his health and strength. His tastes, take them all in all, were as lofty as the tastes of a human being who has suppressed his soul, can pos-

sibly be. Refined love-affairs, luxurious living, music, painting, literature and fine horses afforded his mind, his senses and his pride the fullest enjoyment. He had, in a word, lighted upon the flower of Parisian civilization as a bee lights in the heart of a rose; he drank its essence and took the keenest delight therein.

It is easy to understand that Monsieur de Camors, enjoying such overflowing prosperity, became more and more attached to the moral and religious doctrines to which he owed it. He was strengthened every day in the thought that his father's last words and his own reflections had revealed to him the true gospel of men of superior mould. He was less and less tempted to violate its laws. But, of all the backslidings that would have been in marked conflict with his system, marriage was assuredly the one from which he was farthest removed. It would have been something very like insanity on his part thus to put shackles on his freedom, of which he was making such an agreeable use, to inflict upon himself gratuitously the slavery, the ennui, the absurdity, aye, the dangers of a family, of a community of property and honor, and of the always possible contingency of becoming a father.

He was therefore altogether disinclined to encourage the maternal hopes in which Madame de Tècle had buried her love. He believed, furthermore, that his conduct in her regard was such as to leave her no possibility of illusion on that point. He neglected Reuilly; he

lived there little more than two or three weeks in each year, when the session of the Conseil Général summoned him to the province. During those brief visits, it is true, he prided himself upon doing all that gratitude and respect to Madame de Tècie and Monsieur des Rameures could demand ; but he so coldly refrained from any allusion to the past, he was so careful to avoid private interviews, his manner to Mademoiselle Marie was marked by such indifferent courtesy, that he had no doubt that Mademoiselle Marie's young mother,—the inconstancy of the sex assisting in bringing about that result—would renounce her childish fancies.

He was sadly at fault. And we may remark here that hardened and contemptuous scepticism is a no less prolific source of false judgments and false calculations in this world, than the artless candor of inexperience. Monsieur de Camors took too seriously all that has been written concerning the inconstancy of the female mind, by betrayed lovers, who probably deserved to be betrayed or were angry at having been anticipated. The fact is that women are, as a general rule, remarkable for the persistency of their ideas and the loyalty of their feelings. On the other hand, fickle-heartedness is the special characteristic of man ; but he keeps it to himself, and when a woman disputes the palm with him in that regard, he cries out like an evicted tenant. Anyone will readily be convinced that this theory is in no sense paradoxical, if he will recall the marvels of patient, persistent, unwaver-

ing devotion that we meet with every day among the women of the common people, whose nature, although of coarse mould, is still primitive and sincere. Among society women, the same nature exists, although depraved by the temptations and emotions that assail them, and it not infrequently happens that their whole life is wrapped up in a single thought or a passion. Their lives have not the innumerable sources of distraction which divert our minds and comfort us, and the idea that arouses their passionate interest readily becomes a fixed idea. They pursue it through solitude and through the multitude, through their reading, through their embroidery, through their prayers, through their sleep, through everything; they live in it and die of it.

Thus it was that Madame de Tècle had pursued year after year with undiminished fervor, the project of uniting and commingling the two pure affections which shared her heart between them, by giving her daughter to Monsieur de Camors and thus assuring the happiness of both. Since she had formed that project, which could have been born only in a heart that was as pure as it was loving, her daughter's education had become the pleasant romance of her life. She dreamed of it incessantly. When her great eyes wandered aimlessly among the leaves or rested on some distant corner of the sky, you could be certain that she was seeking there some new virtue or some new grace with which to embellish her daughter for her ideal betrothed. A serious,

almost religious purpose was mingled in Madame de Tècle's mind with the romantic portion of her plans. Although she did not know or even suspect the utter perversity of Monsieur de Camors's character, she realized that the young count, like most of the men of his time, was not overburdened with principles; but she opined that one of the missions set apart for the wife in our social order was the moral renovation of her husband by communion with a virtuous mind, by the sacred ties of family, by the sweet religion of the home. She desired therefore, by moulding her daughter into a lovable and attractive woman, to prepare her for the part she intended her to play, and she neglected no means of adorning her with the qualities such a rôle demands.

What success attended her efforts? The sequel of this story will tell. It is sufficient for the moment to inform the reader that Mademoiselle Marie de Tècle was, at the time at which we have arrived, a young person of very pleasing appearance, whose body, which was a little short, was gracefully set upon hips that were a little high; not beautiful but extremely attractive,—well-educated too, more active in her motions than her mother, and as quick-witted as she. Indeed, Mademoiselle Marie was so quick-witted that her mother feared at times that she had discovered,—how, she had no idea—the secret that concerned her future. Sometimes she talked too much about Monsieur de Camors, sometimes she talked too little about him, and assumed



a mysterious air when others mentioned him. Madame de Tècle was somewhat disturbed by these strange proceedings. As for Monsieur de Camors's conduct and his more than reserved attitude, that also disturbed her somewhat at intervals ; but when one is fond of a person, one puts a favorable interpretation upon everything that that person does or fails to do, and Madame de Tècle was only too glad to attribute Camors's equivocal behavior to the inspiration of chivalrous loyalty. As she believed that she knew him, she thought it quite natural that he should avoid until the last moment, until his definite decision, anything that could bind her or that was likely to cause public gossip, and disturb the repose of mother and daughter. Perhaps, too, the considerable fortune that seemed certain to fall to Mademoiselle de Tècle, added to Monsieur de Camors's scruples by alarming his pride ; meanwhile he did not marry, which was a good omen, and his little fiancée had hardly reached a marriageable age. There was no reason to despair therefore, and Monsieur de Camors might fall at her feet any day and say : "Give her to me." If it was God's will that that joyful page should never be written in the book of her destiny, if she were compelled to marry her daughter to another, the poor woman said to herself that, even so, the pains she had taken with her would not be wasted, and that the dear child would still be better and happier for them.

The long months between Monsieur de Camors's an-

nual visits to Reuilly being filled, so far as Madame de Tècle was concerned, by a single idea and by the pleasant monotony of a regular life, passed more rapidly than the count could imagine. His own active, full existence dug chasms and placed centuries between every two of his periodical journeys; but to Madame de Tècle, after five years, it was still the morrow of the cherished, fateful night when her dream had begun. Since that time, there had not been a break in her thought, not an empty corner in her heart, not a wrinkle on her brow. Her dream had retained its youth, like herself.

And yet, despite the peaceful, rapid passage of her days, she was never able to look forward without impatience and some anxiety to the season that brought Monsieur de Camors to the province every year. As her daughter grew older, she dwelt more upon the impression she was likely to make on the count's mind, and she was more keenly alive to the gravity of the matter. Mademoiselle Marie, who was, as we have already suggested, a quick-witted creature, had not failed to observe that her loving mother usually selected the time for the sessions of the Conseil Général to try new methods of dressing her, Marie's, hair. In the very year when we resume our narrative, a little scene on that subject had taken place, which was only partially agreeable to Madame de Tècle.—She was trying a new headdress on Mademoiselle Marie: Mademoiselle Marie, whose hair was very beautiful and

very black, had a few wild, rebellious locks which drove her mother to despair; there was one, among others, that obstinately persisted, do what she would, in eluding the comb and ribbons, falling upon her forehead and indulging in wanton antics there. Madame de Tècle had at last succeeded—at least she thought so—in so arranging the ribbons that without seeming to serve that purpose alone, they securely confined the recalcitrant curl.

“There, I really believe that will stay,” she said, drawing a long breath and standing back a little to look at her work.

“Don’t be too sure of it, dearest mamma,” said Mademoiselle Marie, who was fond of laughing and had a comical turn of mind; “don’t be too sure of it.—I can see now what will happen.—The bell rings, I hurry to the salon, my curl escapes—entry of Monsieur de Camors, my mother is taken ill.—Tableau!”

“I should be very glad to know what Monsieur de Camors has to do with it?” said Madame de Tècle drily.

Her daughter threw her arms about her neck.

“*Nothing!*” she said.

At other times Mademoiselle de Tècle, in referring to Monsieur de Camors, adopted a tone of bitter irony: it was—“the great man,” “the illustrious individual,” “the neighboring planet,” “the phoenix among the hosts of these forests,” or simply, “the prince!”

Such symptoms had a seriousness which did not escape

Madame de Tècle. In the prince's presence, it is true, the girl abandoned her bantering mood ; but that was another source of vexation. She seemed to her mother cold, awkward, silent, too short and slightly caustic in her replies ; she feared that Monsieur de Camors would form an unfavorable opinion of her from those indications.—Monsieur de Camors formed no opinion of her, favorable or unfavorable ; to him, Mademoiselle de Tècle was simply a pretty, insignificant child of whom he did not think one minute in a year.

There was at this time one person in the world who interested him much more, more indeed than he wished ; that person was the Marquise de Campvallon d'Arminges, born De Luc d'Estrelles.—The general, after exploring a large portion of Europe with his wife, had installed her in his mansion on Rue Vanneau, in the lap of royal luxury. They lived in Paris during the winter and spring ; but the month of July found them at the château of Campvallon, where they abode in great magnificence until late in the autumn. Every year the general invited Madame de Tècle and her daughter to pass a few weeks at Campvallon, judging very wisely that he could not give his wife a better companion. Madame de Tècle gladly accepted the invitations, because they gave her an opportunity to meet from time to time the *élite* of Parisian society, from which, out of respect for her uncle's mania, she had always held aloof. For her own part she cared little ; but her daughter, being steeped in that

supremely refined and distinguished circle, might rid herself of some provincialisms of dress and speech, perfect her taste in the delicate and constantly changing matter of fashions, in short, gain some additional charms. The young marchioness, who at that time reigned and shone, resplendent as a pure white star, in the loftiest spheres of social life, gladly lent her aid in forwarding her neighbor's views. She seemed herself to take a sort of motherly interest in Mademoiselle de Tècle, and often added precept to example. She dressed her, embellished her and arranged her hair with her beautiful hands, and the young girl in return loved, admired, and feared her.

Monsieur de Camors also accepted the general's hospitality every year ; but never so often or for so long a time as his host would have liked. He rarely remained at Campvallou longer than one week. Since the marchioness's return to France, he had been compelled to resume his relations as a friend and kinsman with herself and her husband ; but, although he strove to be as natural as possible with them, his manner was distinguished by a lukewarmness that amazed the general. It will not astonish the reader if he will kindly recall the secret but imperative reasons which justified such circumsppection.

Monsieur de Camors, while refusing to be bound by most of the conventions which men consider binding among themselves, had, nevertheless, religiously clung to

one of them, namely, honor. More than once, in the course of his new life, he had probably felt some embarrassment in limiting and defining with precision the requirements of the only moral law that he chose to respect. It is very easy to find out just what there is in the Gospel ; it is not so easy to find out just what there is in the code of honor ; but there certainly is in that code one article concerning which Monsieur de Camors could make no mistake : it is the article which forbade his attacking the general's honor, under the penalty of becoming in his own eyes a criminal and an outlaw. He had accepted from the old man confidence, affection, favors, benefactions, everything that can bind one man to inviolable respect for another, if in reality there be, under the sun, a thing called honor. He was profoundly conscious of it. And so his conduct toward Madame de Campvallon was beyond reproach, and the more commendable in that the one woman whom he was absolutely forbidden to love, was of all the women in Paris or the world, the one who was naturally most attractive to him. She had for him the fatal attraction of the forbidden fruit, the charm of her strange beauty and the interest of an undecipherable sphinx.

She was more of a goddess than ever. Her husband's vast fortune and his idolatrous affection for her had placed her upon a golden cloud, where she had taken her seat with a graceful majesty, as natural and unaffected as if she were in her proper element. The magnificence

of her dresses, her jewels, her house, her equipages, was chaste and well-balanced. The good taste of the artist was blended with that of the born patrician. Her person seemed in very truth to become divine in the reflection of that splendor. Tall, fair, graceful, with a deep blue eye, a serious brow, a pure, high-bred mouth, it was impossible to see her enter a salon with her light, gliding footsteps, or driving by in her carriage, half-reclining, with her arms folded across her breast and her glance lost in space, without thinking of the immortal maidens to whom love brought death. She had that somewhat stern, savage expression which the sculptors of ancient times saw, doubtless, in their supernatural visions, and gave to the eyes and lips of their statues of the gods of Olympus. Her arms and shoulders, perfect in shape, seemed to have been modelled in the pure, rose-tinted snow that covers virgin mountains. In a word, she was superb and fascinating.

Parisian society respected no less than it admired her; for, in her trying rôle of young wife to an old husband, she gave calumny no opening. With no pretence of extraordinary piety, she did not fail to combine with her worldly luxury a judicious patronage of charitable works and all the exalted practices of fashionable piety. Madame de la Roche-Jugan herself, who watched her at close quarters as one watches a destined victim, bore emphatic testimony to her merit and deemed her every day more worthy of her son. Monsieur de Camors,



who, for his part, watched her, in spite of himself, with intense interest, was generally inclined to believe, like his aunt and the world, that she was carrying out her difficult part conscientiously, and that she found in the splendor of her mode of life and the gratification of her pride a sufficient recompense for the sacrifice of her youth, her heart and her beauty. And yet certain past memories, in conjunction with some peculiarities which he fancied that he observed in the marchioness's behavior, made him suspicious. There were times when, remembering the glimpse he had once caught of fathomless abysses and glowing flames in that heart, he was tempted to suspect the presence of all manner of storms and perhaps of all manner of corruption under that calm exterior. It is true that she was not altogether the same with him as with other people. The character of their intercourse was somewhat peculiar: it was marked by that sort of covert irony which is so often noticeable between two persons who do not wish to remember or to forget. That tone, which was tempered in Monsieur de Camors's speech by good-breeding and respect, was much more strongly accentuated, sometimes to the point of bitterness, in the young woman's. He even fancied that, at times, he could feel the sharp point of coquetry under her manœuvring, and that provocation, vague as it was, from that loving, cold, impassive creature, seemed to him equally alarming and mysterious. It attracted him and disturbed his peace of mind.

Matters had reached that point when Monsieur de Camors, having come as usual to pass the early days of September at the Château de Campvallon, met Madame de Tècle and her daughter there. His visit that year was a sorrowful time to Madame de Tècle. Her confidence was shaken and her conscience began to take fright. She had, it is true, determined in her own mind that she would not abandon hope until Marie should attain her twentieth year, and she was as yet only eighteen; but she had already been sought in marriage, and public rumor had married her several times over. Monsieur de Camors must have heard those rumors which were current throughout the neighborhood, and yet he held his peace, his manner showed no change; it was gravely affectionate with Madame de Tècle, and with Mademoiselle Marie, notwithstanding her lovely eyes, like her mother's, and her conquered curl, it was heedlessly cold.

Monsieur de Camors had other matters in his mind, which Madame de Tècle could hardly suspect. Madame de Campvallon's behavior to him since his arrival at the château seemed to have taken on a more marked character of aggressive raillery. To be on the defensive is never pleasant to a man, and Camors felt that he was more awkward than another in that position because he was less accustomed to it than most men. He determined simply to shorten his stay at Campvallon.

On the day before his departure, about five o'clock in the afternoon, as he was standing at his window, looking

over the trees in the park at the dense lurid clouds that were gathering over the valley, he heard a voice which possessed the power of moving him deeply.

"Monsieur de Camors !"

He saw the marchioness standing under his window.

"Will you walk a little way ?" she asked.

He bowed and went down at once.

"It is stifling, isn't it ?" she said, when he joined her.

"I am going to take a turn in the park and drag you with me."

He murmured some courteous words and they walked away side by side through the winding paths of the park.—She walked rapidly, with her strangely majestic carriage, her supple body, her head erect and thrown back a little under her cap ; one would have looked to see a page behind her ; but there was none, and her long blue dress—she rarely wore short skirts—dragged over the sand and dry leaves with the rhythmical, regular sound of rustling silk.

"Perhaps I disturbed you," she said after a moment.

"What were you dreaming about up there ?"

"Nothing ; I was watching the storm that is coming."

"Are you becoming poetical, cousin ?"

"I do not need to become so, cousin—I am poetical beyond measure."

"I did not think it. You still intend to go to-morrow ?"

"I do."

"Why so soon?"

"I have some business at Reuilly."

"Even so; is not Vatro—Vautrot—what is his name?  
—isn't he there?"

Vautrot was Camors's secretary.

"Vautrot cannot do everything," he said.

"Indeed!—By the way, I don't like your Vautrot."

"Nor do I! but he was recommended to me by my old friend Madame d'Oilly as a philosopher, and by my aunt De la Roche-Jugan as a former seminarist."

"What nonsense!"

"Moreover," continued Camors, "he knows a lot and writes a beautiful hand."

"And what about yourself?"

"About myself?—what do you mean?"

"Do you write a beautiful hand?"

"I will show you whenever you choose."

"Ah! what will you write to me?"

It would be difficult to imagine the tone of supreme indifference and haughty raillery in which the marchioness carried on this curious dialogue, without once slackening her pace or glancing at her companion or altering the proud, erect pose of her head.

"I will write prose—or poetry, as you choose," said Camors.

"Ah! can you write poetry?"

"When I am inspired."

"And when are you inspired?"

"In the morning, as a rule."

"And this is evening; that is not polite to me."

"You, madame, I fancy, have no desire to inspire me."

"Why not, pray? I should be proud and happy to do it.—Do you know what I propose to put there?"

She had stopped abruptly at a rustic bridge over a narrow stream.

"I have no suspicion."

"Aren't you able to guess anything? I propose to put an artificial rockery there."

"Why not a natural one, cousin? For my part, while I was about it, I would build a natural one."

"That's an idea," said the marchioness, walking on across the bridge.—"Why, it really thunders! I adore thunder in the country—and you?"

"I prefer it in Paris."

"Why so?"

"Because I don't hear it."

"You have no imagination."

"I have, but I stifle it."

"Very possibly. I suspect you of concealing your merits as a general rule,—and from me in particular."

"Why should I conceal my merits from you?"

"Should I conceal' is delightful! Why?—For charity's sake—in order not to dazzle me—out of regard for my peace of mind. You are really too kind, I assure you.—Ah! here comes the rain now."

Great drops of rain were in fact beginning to patter on the leaves and splash upon the yellow gravel of the path ; it grew darker and darker and the tree-tops bent before the sudden, sharp gusts.

“ We must return, it is growing serious,” the young woman said.

At a quickened pace, she retook the road to the château, but they had gone only a few steps when a bright flash of lightning rent the clouds just over their heads, a terrific thunderclap burst and the rain fell in torrents.

Luckily there was a place of shelter near at hand where the marchioness and her companion could take refuge. It was the ruins of the chapel of the former château, which had been preserved for the embellishment of the park. It was about as large as a village church. The walls, which were almost intact, were covered with a thick cloak of ivy ; bushes had grown on the top and were entangled with the branches of the ancient trees that surrounded and shaded the ruin. The roof no longer existed : only the extreme end of the choir and the place where the altar formerly stood were covered by what remained of it. In that spot was a large number of wheelbarrows, spades, rakes and tools of all sorts which the gardeners were in the habit of leaving there. The marchioness ran and sought shelter amid the litter in that restricted space, and her companion followed her.

The storm meanwhile redoubled in fury ; the rain fell

in sheets in the enclosure formed by the old walls, flooding the low site of the former nave ; the lightning flashes succeeded one another almost without intermission, and from time to time fragments of mortar fell from the arched roof and were crushed on the flagstones of the little choir.

"For my part, I call this very fine," said Madame de Campvallon.

"So do I," said Camors, looking up at the crumbling arch which had half sheltered them ; "but I do not feel sure that we are safe here."

"If you are afraid, go," said the marchioness.

"I am afraid for you."

"You are too kind, I tell you !"

She took off her cap and began to brush it calmly with her glove to wipe out the marks of the rain.

After a pause she suddenly raised her bare head, and bestowing upon Camors a penetrating glance of the sort that leads a man to expect some redoubtable question :

"Cousin," she said, "if you were sure that one of these brilliant flashes would strike you dead within a quarter of an hour, what would you do ?"

"Why, naturally, cousin," said Camors, "I should say good-bye to you."

"How ?"

He looked her in the face in his turn.

"Do you know," said he, "that there are times when I am tempted to believe that there is a devil in you ?"



"Really? Well, there are times when I am tempted to believe it myself. For instance, do you know what I would like at this moment? I would like to guide the thunder and lightning, and, two minutes hence, you would no longer exist."

"Because—?"

"Because I remember—I remember that there is a man to whom I offered myself and who refused me—and that that man is alive—and that that fact troubles me a little—a great deal—intensely."

"Are you serious, madame?" said Camors—to say something.

She began to laugh.

"You do not think so, I trust," she said. "I am not so wicked. That was a joke, and in poor taste too, I admit; but, in all seriousness now, monsieur and cousin, what do you think of me? what sort of a woman do you suppose I shall become in time?"

"I give you my word that I have absolutely no idea."

"Let us suppose that I shall become, as you did me the honor to suggest a moment ago, a diabolical personage, do you think that you would be in no wise responsible for it? Do not you believe that there is in a woman's life a critical moment when a germ of evil tossed into her mind may produce a terrible harvest? tell me, do you not believe that?—and that I should be pardonable if my feeling for you were that of a destroying

angel?—and that I deserve some credit for being what I am, a good wife, of simple tastes, who loves you well—with a little spite, but not much—and who, in a word, wishes you all sorts of prosperity in this world and the other?—Don't answer, it would embarrass you, and it's needless."

She left her shelter and held her face under the open sky to look at the clouds.

"It is all over," she said. "Let us go."

She noticed then that the lower part of the ruins was transformed into a veritable lake of mud and water; she stopped on the edge of the stairs leading to the choir and uttered a little shriek.

"What am I to do?" she said, glancing at her thin shoes.

Then she turned back to Camors.

"Monsieur," she said, "go and get me a boat!"

Camors himself recoiled as he was about to put his foot in the thick mud and stagnant water with which the whole enclosure of the nave was filled.

"Please wait a little," he said: "I will go and get you some boots, clogs, no matter what."

"There's a much simpler way!" she said with a gesture, as if she had suddenly formed a resolution. "You must carry me to the entrance."

Without awaiting the young man's reply, she busied herself rolling up the lower part of her skirts with much care, and when she had finished:

"Carry me," she said.

He looked at her in amazement, thinking that she was still joking; but she was perfectly serious.

"What are you afraid of?" she continued.

"I am not afraid."

"Aren't you strong enough?"

"*Mon Dieu*, I think so!"

He took her in his arms as in a cradle, while she held her dress with both hands; then he went down the steps and walked toward the door with his strange burden. He had to take great care not to slip on the flooded ground, and that necessity absorbed his attention during the first steps; but when he felt sure of his footing, he was naturally curious to look at the marchioness. Her bare head rested, slightly thrown back, on the arm that supported it; her lips were partly open in an almost malicious smile which disclosed her even, milk-white teeth;—the same expression of fierce mischief gleamed in her half-shaded eyes, which rested upon Camors's for two seconds in a penetrating gaze, then suddenly took refuge behind the bluish fringe of her eyelids.—He felt as if a flash of lightning had pierced his bones to the marrow.

"Do you want to drive me mad?" he muttered.

"Who knows?" was her reply.

At the same moment she slipped from his arms to the ground and left the ruins.

They returned to the château without exchanging a

word. Not until they were about to enter the salon did the marchioness say, turning to Camors :

“Be sure that at heart I am a very good woman—really I am !”

Despite that assurance Monsieur de Camors took his leave the next morning as he had determined to do.

He carried away a most painful impression caused by the scene of the night before. She had wounded his pride, inflamed his passion, alarmed his honor. What sort of woman was she and what did she want of him? Was it love or vengeance that inspired that infernal coquetry? Whatever it was, Monsieur de Camors was not enough of a novice in adventures of that sort not to distinguish clearly the yawning abyss under the broken ice; so he determined in all sincerity to close it between them forever. The surest way to succeed would certainly have been to break off all relations with the marchioness; but how could he explain such a course of conduct to the general without arousing his suspicions and running the risk of ruining his wife forever in his mind? It was impossible. He armed himself therefore with all the courage he possessed and resigned himself to submit, unmoved, to all the tests which the real or pretended hostility of the marchioness might have in store for him.

## II

About that time he conceived a singular project. He was a member of several of the most aristocratic clubs. It occurred to him to bring together a certain number of men, selected from the most congenial of his colleagues, and to form with them a secret association whose purpose should be to establish and to maintain among its members the principles of honor in their strictest form. This society, which was vaguely referred to in public under the name of the society of *Les Raffinés*, and also of the *Templars*—which was its real name—had nothing in common with the *Dévorants* made famous by Balzac. There was nothing romantic or dramatic in its character. Those who belonged to it did not pretend in any manner to take their stand outside of common morality, or above the laws of the country. They bound themselves by no oath to assist one another to the last extremity. They simply pledged themselves upon their word to observe in their reciprocal relations the purest rules of honor. Those rules were definitively set forth in their code. It is difficult to as-

certain the exact text ; but it seems that they concerned almost entirely those questions of honor that commonly arise among men in the special spheres of club-life, card-playing, sport, duelling, and love-making. For instance, any member of the association dishonored and disqualified himself by paying court to the wife or the mistress of one of his confrères. There was no other penalty than expulsion ; but the consequences of expulsion were serious, as each of the members ceased from that moment to bow to or even to recognize the unworthy member. The *Templars* found one great advantage in this secret understanding, namely, perfect confidence in their mutual relations, in the various circumstances of their daily lives, whether in the wings, in salons, around the tables of the club, or on the grand stand at the race tracks.

Camors was undoubtedly an exception among his companions and his rivals in the upper circles of Parisian life, in the matter of the depth and systematic precision of his doctrines ; he was not an exception in the matter of absolute scepticism and practical materialism ; but the need of a moral law is so natural to man and it is so pleasant to him to obey the rein of a lofty conception, that the chosen few to whom Camors's plan was at first submitted, received it enthusiastically, being glad to substitute a sort of positive, definite religion, however restricted its limits, for the confused and vague current notions of honor. As for Camors himself, as the reader will divine, his purpose was to erect a new barrier be-

tween himself and the passion that fascinated him. He bound himself thus, more firmly than ever, with the single moral bond that he still recognized. He completed his work by inducing the general to accept the presidency of the association. The general, to whom honor was a sort of mysterious, but real deity, was enchanted to preside at the worship of his idol. He was grateful to his young friend for the idea and esteemed him even more because of it.

Midwinter had arrived. The Marquise de Campvallon had long since taken up the thread of her simple yet fashionable mode of life; prompt in her attendance at church in the morning, at the Bois and the charity bazaars during the day, at the Opéra or the Italiens in the evening. She had met Monsieur de Camors without the slightest indication of emotion, and had even treated him more naturally and with more simplicity of manner than before: no reference to the past, no allusion to the scene in the park during the storm—as if she had poured out that day, once for all, what she had upon her heart. Her behavior resembled indifference. Monsieur de Camors should have been overjoyed by it, and he was aggrieved. A painful interest, but a powerful one and already too dear to his surfeited heart, thus disappeared from his life. He was decidedly inclined to believe that Madame de Campvallon's character was much less profound and less puzzling than he had imagined, that she had gradually lost her individuality in



the sea of commonplace society women, and that she had become in reality what she pretended to be—a good woman, content with her lot and inoffensive.

One evening he was in his seat in the orchestra at the Opéra. They were singing *Les Huguenots*. The marchioness was in her box between the pillars. During the early entr'actes Camors met several persons in the corridors and was prevented from going as soon as usual to pay his respects to his cousin. After the fourth act, however, he went to her box, where he found her alone, the general having gone down to the greenroom. He was amazed, as he entered, to see the marks of recent tears on the young woman's cheeks; her eyes, too, were still moist. She seemed displeased to be caught in the act of showing emotion.

"Music always affects my nerves a little," she said.

"Come, come!" rejoined Camors; "you reprove me for concealing my merits, why conceal yours? If you are still capable of tears, so much the better for you!"

"Oh no!" she said. "I am entitled to no credit for that. Ah! *Mon Dieu!* if you knew—quite the contrary is true."

"What a mystery you are!"

"Are you very curious to solve the mystery?—so curious as that? Very well, be satisfied. It is time to have done with it."

She moved her chair a little away from the front of

the box and from the sight of the audience, turned to Camors and continued :

“So you want to know what I am, what I feel, what I think—or rather you simply want to know if I am thinking of love. Very good ; I think of nothing else.—What next?—Whether I have or have not lovers?—I have none nor shall I ever have—not from virtue, for I believe in nothing—but from self-esteem and contempt for others. These petty intrigues, these petty passions, these petty love-affairs which I see in society make me ill. Women who give themselves for so little must really be base creatures ! As for myself, I remember that I told you one day—it was a thousand years ago !—that my person is sacred to me, and, in order to commit a sacrilege, I must feel, like the vestal virgins at Rome, a love as great as my crime, as terrible as death. I wept just now during that magnificent fourth act. It was not only because I was listening to the most marvellous music that was ever heard on earth, but because I admired, because I passionately envied the glorious passions of those days. And they are true to life ! When I read the history of that noble 16th century, I am in ecstasy. How well those people knew how to love—and to die. One night of love, and they die ! It is fascinating !—There you have the mystery, cousin ; now go, people are looking at us. They will think we are in love, and as we have not that pleasure, it is useless to reap its inconveniences. Besides I am still

at the court of Charles IX. and you are a pitiful object to me with your black coat and round hat. Good-night."

"I am greatly obliged to you," said Camors.

He took the hand which she indifferently offered him and left the box.

He met Monsieur de Campvallon in the corridor.

"*Parbleu!* my dear friend," said the general, taking his arm, "I must tell you of an idea that has been in my head all the evening."

"What is it, general?"

"Well, there's a crowd of charming young women here to-night. That made me think of you. I even said to my wife:—'We must marry Camors to one of those girls!'"

"Oh! general!"

"Well, what is it?"

"It's a very serious matter. Suppose one makes a mistake in his selection—that goes a long way!"

"Oh! pshaw! there is no difficulty about that. Take a wife like mine, who is very pious, has little imagination and no temper. That's the whole secret!—I tell you this between ourselves, my dear fellow."

"At all events, general, I'll think about it."

"Think about it," said the general with a very knowing expression.

And he went to join his young wife, whom he knew so well.

As for her, she knew herself extremely well and had described herself with amazing accuracy. Madame de Campvallou was not, in her way, any more than Monsieur de Camors was in his, an exception in Parisian society, although two wills so energetic and two minds so well endowed as theirs were likely to carry the vulgar forms of depravity to a degree rarely seen.

The artificial atmosphere of the highest Parisian civilization really deprives women of the sentiment of duty and the taste therefor, leaving them only the sentiment of pleasure and the taste for it. In those surroundings as gorgeous and as false as a fairy scene on the stage, they lose the true conception of life in general and of Christian life in particular, and we may safely assert that all those who do not make for themselves, apart from the giddy whirl, a sort of Thebais—and there are such—are heathens. They are heathens because the pleasures of the flesh and the mind alone interest them, and they have not once a year an idea, an impression of moral order, unless they are forcibly recalled to it by maternity—which some of them abhor; they are heathens like the lovely, impious Catholics of the sixteenth century, enamored of luxurious living, of rich stuffs, of priceless furniture, of letters, art, themselves and love; they are charming heathens like Mary Stuart, and capable, like her, of becoming Christians once more under the axe.

We are speaking, be it understood, of the best of them, the select few, those who read and think and muse. As

for the others, those who know only the trivial sides of Parisian life and its puerile excitements, those foolish, busy creatures, who exchange visits, make appointments, are easily excited, dress and gossip and fly about day and night to no purpose, and dance in a sort of frenzy in the beams of the Parisian sun, without thoughts, without passions, without virtues, aye, and without vices, —it must be confessed that it is impossible to imagine anything more contemptible.

The Marquise de Campvallon was therefore, in reality, as she had told the man who resembled her, a great heathen ; and, as she had also told him, Monsieur de Camors, in one of those momentous hours when a woman's destiny hesitates and is at last decided, had sown in her mind and her heart a seed which had flourished wonderfully.

Camors hardly thought of blaming himself for it ; but, being deeply impressed by all the points of similarity that drew him and the marchioness together, he regretted more bitterly than ever the fatality that kept them apart. Feeling surer of himself, however, since he had bound himself by the most stringent obligations of honor, he yielded thenceforth with less scruple to the curiosity and excitement of a peril against which he believed himself to be invincibly protected. He did not fear to seek his fair cousin's society more frequently, and even fell into the habit of calling upon her once or twice a week when he left the Chamber. When he found her alone, their

conversation invariably assumed on both sides the ironical and covertly provocative tone in which they both excelled. He had not forgotten her bold confidence at the Opéra, and he freely reminded her of it, asking her if she had succeeded in finding the love hero she sought, who was certain to be, so he said, a villain like Bothwell or a musician like Rizzio.

"There are villains who are also musicians," she retorted. "By the way, sing me something."

Toward the close of the winter the marchioness gave a ball; her parties were justly celebrated for magnificence and good taste. She did the honors with queenly grace. That evening she wore a very simple costume, as a courteous hostess should do: a long dress of dark velvet, bare arms without bracelets, a necklace of great pearls on her white bosom, and for headdress, her marchioness's coronet resting on the delicate edifice of her fair hair. Camors caught her eye when he entered, as if she were waiting for him. He had called upon her the preceding evening and there had been a livelier skirmish than usual between them. He was struck by her brilliant appearance. Her beautiful face, overexcited, doubtless, by the concealed ardor of the struggle, and illumined, as it were, by a flame burning within, had the chaste splendor of transparent alabaster. When he had succeeded in making his way to her side and paying his respects, he yielded, in spite of himself, to an impulse of passionate admiration.

"Really you are beautiful enough this evening," he said, "to make one commit a crime!"

She gazed earnestly into his eyes.

"I would like to see that!" she said, and walked away with her air of superb indifference.

The general had drawn near them, and said, laying his hand on the count's shoulder:

"Camors, you are not dancing any more than usual. Shall we have a game of piquet?"

"With pleasure, general."

They passed through two or three salons to the marchioness's private boudoir, a small room, oval in shape, very high, and hung in thick red silk with black and white flowers. Although the doors were removed, two heavy portières completely isolated that sanctum from the adjoining salon. There the general was accustomed to play cards and sometimes to sleep during his wife's parties. A small card-table was placed near a couch. Except for that detail the boudoir retained its familiar, every-day aspect, with pieces of fancy work, books, newspapers and reviews scattered over the furniture.

After two or three games which the general won—Camors was absent-minded—he said:

"I blame myself, young man, for keeping you so long from the ladies. I restore your liberty—I am going to look over the papers."

"There's nothing new, I think," said Camors, rising.

He took up a paper himself and stood with his back to



the fire, warming his feet one after the other. The general, lying back upon the couch, ran through the *Moniteur de l'Armée*, expressed his approval of some military promotions, found fault with others and gradually fell into a doze, his head sunk on his breast.

Monsieur de Camors did not read. He listened vaguely to the music of the orchestra and dreamed. He followed in his thoughts, through the melodious strains, the murmurs and the warm perfumes of the ball, the movements of her who was its mistress and its queen; he saw her stately, supple gait, he heard her grave, musical voice, he inhaled her breath. The young man had exhausted everything: love and pleasure had no further secrets or temptations for him; but his surfeited, prematurely old imagination awoke inflamed before that beautiful, living, quivering marble. That pure, classic beauty, devoured by internal fires, moved him to the very depths of his soul. She was in very truth more than a woman, more than a mortal to him. The fables of old, the amorous goddesses, drunken Bacchantes, superhuman bliss, the unknown and unattainable in earthly pleasure—all these were true, real, at his hand, within two steps;—and he was separated from them by naught but the irksome shadow of that sleeping old man!—But that shadow was honor!

His eyes, as if lost in reverie, were fixed upon the portière in front of him, opposite the fireplace. Suddenly that portière was put aside, almost without a sound,

and the marchioness's beautiful coroneted brow appeared under the folds of the drapery. She embraced the whole interior of the boudoir at a single glance, and after a moment's pause, softly let the portière fall and walked directly towards Camors, who was transfixed by astonishment. She took his hands without speaking, looked earnestly at him, cast a swift glance at her sleeping husband ; then, raising herself a little on her feet she offered the young man her lips. He was seized with vertigo, forgot everything, stooped and obeyed her.

At the same moment the general moved suddenly and awoke ; but the marchioness was already standing in front of him, with her hands on the card table.

"Good-morning, my general," she said, smiling at him.

The general murmured a few words of apology, whereat she playfully pushed him back on the couch.

"Go to sleep again," she said ; "I came to get my cousin to dance part of the cotillon with me."

She walked toward the door. Camors, pale as a ghost, followed her. As they passed under the portière, she turned and said in an undertone :

"There's your crime !"

Then she vanished amid the crowd that still filled the salons.

Camors did not try to overtake her, and it seemed to him that she avoided him.—A quarter of an hour later he left the Campvallon mansion.

He returned home at once. A lamp was lighted in his room. When he saw his face in the mirror as he passed, he was terrified. That horrible scene had been too much for him. It was no longer possible for him to deceive himself: his pupil had become his master. There was nothing surprising in the fact itself. Women rise higher than we in moral grandeur: there is no form of courage, of devotion, of heroism in which they do not surpass us; but, when they have once started on the downward path, they fall more rapidly and lower than men. That fact is due to two causes; they are more passionate and they have no conception of honor.

For honor is something after all, and we must not decry it. Honor is a noble, elevated, salutary custom. It heightens the manly qualities. It takes the place of modesty in man. It is sometimes a source of strength, it is always attractive.—But to think that honor is sufficient for all purposes, that in face of the great interests, the great passions, the great trials of life, it is an infallible support and defence, that it takes the place of principles that come to us from a higher power, that it is, in a word, an adequate substitute for God—to think that is to commit a grave error—it is to run the risk of losing in one fatal moment all self-respect, and of falling suddenly and forever into the dark ocean of bitterness wherein the Comte de Camors was, at that moment, struggling desperately, like a shipwrecked sailor in the darkness.

During that ill-fated night he fought one last agonizing battle and lost it. The next evening, at six o'clock, he was at the marchioness's door.

He found her in her own apartments, in the midst of her regal splendor. She was half reclining in an easy-chair by the fireplace, a little pale and tired. She received him with her customary ease of manner and coldness.

"Good-evening," she said; "you are well?"

"Not very," said Camors.

"Why is that?"

"I fancy that you have a suspicion."

She looked at him with wondering eyes and did not reply.

"No more music, madame, I beg you," said Camors with a smile, "for the curtain has risen and the drama is beginning."

"Ah! let us see it!"

"Do you love me," he said, "or did you simply undertake to try me last night? Can you and will you tell me?"

"I certainly could, but I don't choose to."

"I should have thought you more frank."

"I have my hours."

"Very good," retorted Camors, "if the hour for frankness has gone by with you, it has arrived with me—"

"That's a compensation," said she.

"And I propose to prove it to you," continued Camors.

"I am delighted to hear it," said the marchioness, settling herself comfortably in her chair, as one does the better to enjoy a pleasant diversion.

"I love you, madame—and I love you as you wish to be loved. I love you ardently, to the death, well enough to sacrifice my own life, and to kill you."

"Very fine, that," said the marchioness in an undertone.

"But," he continued in a low, restrained voice, "by loving you, by telling you that I love you, by trying to induce you to share my love, I am shamelessly violating certain obligations of honor which you know about—and some others of which you know nothing. It is a crime, as you have said. I do not seek to palliate my offence. I see it, I realize it and I accept it. I shatter the last moral bond that still retains its hold upon me. I leave the ranks of men of honor, I leave the ranks of men of humanity even. There is no longer anything human about me except my love, anything sacred to me except you; but my crime must be redeemed by some grandeur in itself.—Very good, this is the idea I have formed of it. I conceive two beings, equally free and strong, loving and esteeming each other alone above everything, having no affection, no devotion, no loyalty, no honor, except to each other, but having all those virtues to a supreme degree between themselves. I give you and

consecrate to you absolutely my person, all that I am, all that I can ever become, on condition that you do the same. Let us remain within the social pale, outside of it we should both be wretched. Secretly united and secretly isolated upon an unknown eminence, living in the midst of the multitude, but dominating and despising it, let us make a common store of our gifts, our faculties, our powers, our two Parisian sovereignties—yours, which cannot expand, and mine, which will expand, if you love me—and let us live thus, each in the other, each for the other, until death.—You have dreamed, you say, of strange, almost sacrilegious passions; this is such a one.—But, before you accept my suggestion, think well upon it, for I promise you that I am very much in earnest. My love for you is beyond bounds. I love you enough to despise and trample under my feet what the lowest of men continue to respect. I love you enough to find in you alone, in your esteem alone, in your affection alone, in the pride and intoxication of belonging to you, forgetfulness, and consolation for the thought of friendship outraged, faith betrayed, honor lost!—But, madame, you must understand that this is a sentiment with which you will do very wrong to play.—And now, if you care for my love, if you consent to this alliance—opposed to all the laws of the world, but great at least and unusual—deign to tell me so and I will fall at your feet. If you do not agree, if it frightens you, if you are not ready for all the very serious obligations it entails, why, tell me so;

do not fear a word, a reproach from me. Whatever it may cost me, I will break off everything, I will go away, I will part from you forever, and what took place yesterday will be as if it had never happened."

He ceased to speak and fixed his eyes upon the young woman's with an expression of devouring anxiety.

As he spoke she had assumed a more serious air ; she listened with her head bent forward a little, in an attitude of intense curiosity, darting at him at intervals a glance lighted up by a smouldering fire. A faint, rapid palpitation of the bosom, a slight trembling of the dilated nostrils alone gave token of the storm raging within.

"This is really becoming very interesting," she said after a pause ; "but you do not intend, in any event, to go away this evening, I presume?"

"No," said Camors.

"Very well," she rejoined, dismissing him with a motion of the head and without offering him her hand, "we will see each other again."

"But when?"

"At the first opportunity."

He thought that he understood her to ask time for reflection, being a little dismayed doubtless by the monster she had evoked.—He bowed gravely and retired.

The next day and the two following days, he presented himself to no purpose at Madame de Campvallon's door. The marchioness was to dine out and was dressing.

Those days were like centuries of torture to Mon-



sieur de Camors. A thought that had often worried him took possession of him with a sort of poignant certitude. The marchioness did not love him. She had simply undertaken to revenge herself for the past, and, having dishonored him, she was laughing at him : she had made him sign the compact and then she eluded him.—And yet for all the rending of his pride, his passion, far from becoming weaker, became more ungovernable.

On the fourth day after their interview he did not go to her house. He hoped to see her in the evening at the Vicomtesse d'Oilly's, where they were in the habit of meeting every Friday. The Vicomtesse d'Oilly was the former mistress of the elder Monsieur de Camors, who had thought fit to entrust his son's education to her. Camors had retained a sort of affection for her. She was a good soul whom everybody liked and whom everybody made fun of more or less. It was a long time since she had been young ; being compelled to abandon harlotry, which had been the principal occupation of her prime, and having no taste for religion, she had taken it into her head in her declining years to have a salon. She received some men of distinction there, scientists, authors, artists. They prided themselves on their free-thinking. The viscountess, in order to make herself equal to the demands of her new position, had determined to seek enlightenment. She attended the public courses of lectures and also the debating societies which were just coming into fashion. She could talk glibly

enough about spontaneous generations. She manifested great surprise, however, on the day when Camors, who delighted to torment her, thought it his duty to inform her that men were descended from monkeys.

"Really, my friend," she said, "I can't agree to that. How can such a charming man as you are believe that his grandfather was a monkey?"

She argued upon all subjects with equal acumen. Nevertheless she prided herself on being a philosopher; but sometimes, early in the morning, she stole out secretly, with a very thick veil, and went to Saint-Sulpice, where she confessed, in order to make herself straight with the good Lord, in case there should prove to be such an individual.

She was rich, of very good family, and, despite the very considerable backslidings of her youth, the best people went to her house. Madame de Campvallon had allowed Camors to introduce her there, and Madame de la Roche-Jugan followed her, because she, with her son Sigismond, followed her everywhere.

On the evening in question there were but few persons there. Monsieur de Camors had the satisfaction of seeing the general and the marchioness come in, a few moments after his own arrival. She calmly expressed her regret at not having been at home on the preceding days; but it was difficult to hope for a decisive explanation in such a sparse assemblage and under Madame de la Roche-Jugan's watchful eye. In vain did

Camors question his young cousin's features. They were lovely and cold as always. His anxiety increased. He would have given his life at that moment for a word of love from her.

The Vicomtesse d'Oilly was fond of intellectual games, although her own intellect was very limited. In her salon they played *secrétaire* and *petits papiers*, which are fashionable amusements to this day. Those innocent games are not always innocent, as we shall see.

Pencils, pens and little square pieces of paper were distributed to those who cared to play, and they sat, some around a large table, others in chairs by themselves, mysteriously scribbling questions and answers, while the general and Madame de la Roche-Jugan played whist.—Madame de Campvallou was not in the habit of taking part in games of that sort, which bored her beyond measure, and Monsieur de Camors was amazed to see that she had accepted the pencil and papers that the viscountess offered her. That unusual circumstance aroused his attention and put him on his guard. He joined in the game himself, also contrary to his custom, and undertook to collect the little papers in a basket as they were written.—An hour passed without any special incident. Treasures of wit were squandered. The most delicate and most unexpected questions :—"What is love?"—"Do you believe that friendship between the sexes is possible?"—"Is it sweeter to love or to be loved?"

—quietly succeeded one another, with replies in the same vein.

Suddenly the marchioness uttered a faint shriek, and a drop of blood was seen trickling gently down her forehead: in a moment she was laughing and pointed to her little silver pencil which had at one end a pen with which she had pricked her forehead when she was deeply absorbed in thought. Camors's attention redoubled from that moment, especially as a swift, determined glance from the marchioness seemed to give him warning that something was about to happen.—She was sitting in a corner, partly in shadow, to meditate more unreservedly upon her questions and answers. A moment later, as Camors went about the salon collecting the papers, she placed one in the basket and slipped another into his hand with the feline dexterity of her sex.

Amid all those scattered, crumpled bits of paper, which everyone enjoyed reading after the game was over, Monsieur de Camors found no difficulty in reading the marchioness's clandestine note, without attracting attention: it was written in reddish ink, a little pale, but perfectly legible, and contained these words:

“I belong, body, soul, honor and worldly goods, to my beloved cousin Louis de Camors, now and forever.

“Written and signed with the pure blood of my veins.

“CHARLOTTE DE LUC D'ESTRELLES.

“March 5, 185—.”

All Camors's blood rushed to his brain, a cloud passed before his eyes and he leaned for support upon a chair : then his face suddenly became deathly pale.—These were not symptoms of remorse or fear. His passion overpowered everything. He was conscious of a boundless joy. He saw the whole world under his feet.

By that act of extraordinary frankness and hardihood, seasoned with the fierce mysticism peculiar to the sixteenth century, which she adored, the Marquise de Campvallon delivered herself to her lover and their fatal union was sealed.

### III

About six weeks had elapsed since this last episode ; it was about five o'clock in the afternoon and the marchioness was awaiting Monsieur de Camors, who was to call upon her after the session of the Corps Législatif. Suddenly there was a knock at that one of the doors of her room which communicated with her husband's apartments. It was the general. She noticed with surprise, even with apprehension, that his features were discomposed.

"What is it, my dear?" she said. "Are you ill?"

"No," replied the general, "not at all."

He stood directly in front of her and gazed at her a moment without speaking ; his gray eyes rolled about in their sockets.

"Charlotte," he began at last, with a painful smile, "I must confess my folly to you,—I have not lived since this morning. I have received a strange letter ; do you care to see it?"

"If you wish me to," she said.

He took a letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

It was in a handwriting that was evidently and laboriously disguised, and it was not signed.

"An anonymous letter?" said the marchioness, raising her eyebrows slightly in token of contempt.

Then she began to read the letter, which was thus conceived :

"A true friend, general, is indignant to see that your confidence and loyalty are being abused. You are betrayed by those you love best. A man overwhelmed with your benefactions, a woman who owes everything to you, are united by a secret understanding that is an outrage upon you. They look forward longingly to the hour when they can divide your booty. He who deems it his pious duty to give you this warning, has no wish to speak ill of anyone. He is persuaded that your honor is respected by her to whom you have entrusted it ; she is still worthy of your affection and your esteem, she has done no other wrong than to lend an ear to the schemes for the future which your best friend is not ashamed to build upon your death, your widow and your inheritance. The poor woman yields, against her will, to the fascination of a man already too famous by reason of his prestige as a seducer ; but what words will describe the conduct of that man, your friend, almost your son? All virtuous people are outraged by it, and especially he who owes his information to a conversation overheard by chance, and who obeys his conscience by giving you this warning."



The marchioness, having read the letter through, coldly handed it back to the general.

"Signed: Eléonore-Jeanne de la Roche-Jugan," she said.

"Do you think so?" asked the general.

"It is as clear as day," was the reply.—"*The pious duty—prestige as a seducer—all virtuous people.*"—She has succeeded in disguising her handwriting but not her style—and the most conclusive point of all is that she attributes to Monsieur de Camors—of course he is the man referred to—her own plans and schemes, which have not escaped your notice any more than mine, I suppose?"

"If I thought that that cowardly epistle was her work," cried the general, "I would never see her again as long as I live!"

"Why so? you ought to laugh at it."

The general began one of his solemn promenades up and down the room. The marchioness watched the clock uneasily. Her husband surprised one of her glances in that direction. He halted abruptly.

"Do you expect Camors to-day?" he demanded.

"Yes, I think that he will come after the session."

"I thought so," rejoined the general.

He smiled convulsively.

"Do you know, my dear," he added, "that an absurd idea has haunted me ever since I received that infamous letter?—for I really believe such infamy is contagious."

"Have you had the idea of playing the spy at our interview?" said the marchioness in a lazy, bantering tone.

"Yes," said the general, "from behind the portière yonder, as they do on the stage; but, thank God! I was able to resist that base temptation. If I should ever give way to such weakness, I should like it to be with your consent at all events."

"And do you ask my consent?" said the marchioness.

"My poor Charlotte," he replied, in a grieved, almost suppliant tone, "I am an old fool, an old baby; but I feel that that wretched letter is going to poison my life. I shall never know another hour's peace or confidence. What can you expect?—I have been so cruelly betrayed already.—I am a loyal man, but I am forced to admit that the whole world is not like me. There are some things that seem as impossible to me as walking on my head, and yet I know that other people do those things every day.—What shall I say to you? As I read those hateful lines I could not help remembering that your relations with Camors have been somewhat more intimate of late."

"That is certainly so," said the marchioness, "I am very fond of him."

"I also recalled your tête-à-tête in the boudoir the other evening, during the ball. When I woke, you both had a very mysterious air. What mystery can there be between you?"

“ Ah ! that’s the question ! ” said the marchioness with a smile.

“ May I not know it ? ”

“ You will know it when the time comes. ”

“ I swear to you that I do not suspect you—neither you nor him—I do not suspect you of betraying me outright, of outraging me, of dishonoring my name,—God forbid !—But, suppose that you love each other, even though you respect my honor—suppose you love each other and tell each other of it !—suppose that you both sit here at my side, in my arms,—you, my two friends, my two children—impatiently watching the progress of my old age, making your plans for the future, smiling at the thought of my impending death—and postponing your happiness till my grave is filled—you might think yourselves innocent perhaps. But I say, no, it would be perfectly ghastly ! ”

Under the empire of the passion that carried him away, the general had raised his voice ; his commonplace features had taken on an expression of solemn dignity and stately menace.—A faint pallor overspread the young woman’s lovely face, and her brow contracted slightly. With an effort which would have been sublime in a better cause, she instantly mastered her passing weakness and said coldly, pointing to the draped doorway through which her husband had come :

“ Very well, you may stand there. ”

“ You will never forgive me, will you ? ”

"You know nothing at all about women, my dear. Jealousy is one of the crimes which they not only forgive but love."

"*Mon Dieu!* this is not jealousy!"

"Call it what you please. At all events stand there!"

"Do you really authorize me to do it?"

"I beg you to.—Meanwhile, go to your own room, if you choose, leave that door open, and come when you see Monsieur de Camors enter the courtyard."

"No," said the general after a moment's hesitation, "as I am doing so much"—and he sighed with touching melancholy—"I do not propose to leave myself any possible excuse for suspicion. If I should leave you before he comes, I am quite capable of imagining—"

"That I have warned him secretly, eh? Nothing could be more natural. So remain here. Only take a book, for our conversation would be likely to languish until we adjust ourselves to the new order."

He sat down.

"But after all," he said, "what mystery can there be between you?"

"That's the question!" she said again with a sphinx-like smile.

The general mechanically took up a book and she stirred the fire and reflected.

As she liked to have danger, melodrama and terror mingled with her love-affairs, she should have been content, for at that moment shame, ruin and death were at

her door ; but, to tell the truth, there were too many of them at once, even for her, and, when she came to consider, in the silence that had fallen upon them, the nature and the real extent of the peril, she thought that her heart would break and her mind go astray.

She had made no mistake, by the way, as to the origin of the letter.

That shameful masterpiece was indeed the work of Madame de la Roche-Jugan. To do her justice, Madame de la Roche-Jugan had had no suspicion of the full scope of the blow she struck. She really believed in the marchioness's virtue ; but, in her untiring watchfulness, she had not failed to notice Camors's assiduous attentions to Madame de Campvallon for several months past, and to observe a marked change in their worldly relations. It will not be forgotten that it was her dream that young Sigismond should be her old friend's successor : she foresaw a formidable rivalry and determined to destroy it in the seed. To arouse the general's suspicion against Camors and induce him to close his door to him, was all that she had intended ; but her anonymous letter, like most despicable knavery of that sort, proved to be a more deadly and more murderous weapon than its detestable author had imagined.

The young marchioness was musing therefore as she stirred her fire and glanced furtively now and then at the clock. Monsieur de Camors was likely to arrive at any moment. There was no means of putting him on his

guard. In the present stage of their relations, it was impossible to conceive that his first words would not betray their secret, and, the secret once betrayed, there was nothing less in store for her than public dishonor, notorious degradation, poverty, the convent, and for her husband or her lover, perhaps for both, death.

When the bell rang in the courtyard, announcing the count's arrival, all these visions thronged for the last time into Madame de Campvallon's brain like a legion of phantoms ; then, with a supreme effort, she summoned all her courage and brought all her faculties to bear upon the execution of the plan she had conceived in haste—a plan which was her last hope, and which a word, a gesture, a second's inattention or failure to understand on the part of Monsieur de Camors might utterly overthrow.

Without speaking she nodded smilingly to her husband and motioned to him to go to his hiding-place. The general, who had risen at the sound of the bell, seemed to hesitate still ; then, shrugging his shoulders as if in self-contempt, he retired behind the portières opposite the hall-door of the room.

A moment later, the door was opened by a servant and Monsieur de Camors entered.—He walked into the room with marked eagerness of manner, directing his steps toward the fireplace, and his smiling lips were already opened to speak, when he suddenly met the marchioness's eye and the words were frozen on his lips ; there was in her glance, which had been fastened upon him from the

moment he appeared, a cold and spectral fixity which, without telling him anything, led him to fear everything. He was a man accustomed to difficult situations, farsighted and prudent as well as courageous. He did not move an eyelash, said not a word and waited.

She gave him her hand, still gazing at him at close quarters with the same alarming intensity.

"Either she is mad," he said to himself, "or we are in danger."

With the swift perception of her genius and her love, she felt that he understood, and on the instant, not even giving their silence time to compromise them, she began:

"You are very good to keep your word."

"Why, that is a very small favor," said Camors, seating himself as he spoke.

"No, for you know that you have come here to be tormented again. Well, tell me, have you come around a little to my fixed idea?"

"What fixed idea? It seems to me that you have several."

"Yes, but I mean the good—that is to say the best of them all—your marriage, in short."

"What, again, cousin," said Camors, who, assured thenceforth that the danger really existed and suspecting its nature, walked with a firmer step over the scorching ground.

"Again, cousin.—And let me tell you something. I have found the person!"



"Ah! then I shall run away!"

She flashed an imperious glance at him through her smile.

"Are you really bent upon it?" laughed Camors.

"I am indeed. I do not need to repeat my reasons, as I have been preaching at you all the winter on the subject,—to such a point, indeed, as to disturb the general, who has scented a mystery between us."

"The deuce! the general?"

"Oh! nothing serious, you understand.—Come, let us run over the names: Not Miss Campbell—*she* is too light, which is not very courteous to me, by the way; not Mademoiselle de Silas—too thin!—not Mademoiselle Rolet, despite her millions—her family is too good!—not Mademoiselle d'Esgrigny—too much of the Bacquière and Van Cuyp style! It was rather discouraging you must agree; but no matter—I redoubled my efforts; and I tell you I have found what I sought! a marvel!"

"Whose name, said Camors, "is —?"

"Marie de Tècle."

There was a pause.

"Well, have you nothing to say?" continued the marchioness. "Because there is nothing for you to say, because she combines everything, personal beauty, education, family, fortune—everything in short—a dream! And then your estates adjoin. You see, I think of everything, my friend. But really I don't know why we never thought of her before."

Monsieur de Camors still said nothing, and the marchioness began to be surprised at his silence.

"Oh! it's of no use for you to try to think up objections," she continued, "for there are none. You are caught this time. Come, my friend, say yes. I beg you!"

And while her lips said "*I beg you!*" in a sweet, coaxing tone, her glance said with terrible emphasis: "You must!"

"Am I not to be allowed to reflect, madame?" he asked.

"No, my friend."

"But," rejoined Camors, who was very pale, "it seems to me that you are making very free with Mademoiselle de Tècle's hand.—Mademoiselle de Tècle is very wealthy. People are finding husbands for her in all directions. Besides, her great-uncle is provincial in his ideas, and her mother has ideas in the matter of religion which might well—"

"I will undertake to arrange it," interposed the marchioness.

"But what a mania you have for marrying people off!"

"Women who don't make love, cousin, have a mania for making marriages."

"But seriously, you will give me a few days to think it over?"

"Think what over? Haven't you always said that

you expected to marry—that you were only waiting for a good opportunity? Well, you will never find a better one than this—and if you let it slip, you will regret it all your life.”

“But at least give me time to consult my family.”

“Your family? What folly! I should say that you were decidedly of age.—And what members of your family? Your aunt De la Roche-Jugan?”

“To be sure; and yet I should not like to wound her.”

“Ah! *mon Dieu!* banish any such fear. I tell you that she will rejoice.”

“Why do you think so?”

“I have my reasons.”

As she uttered the words, the young woman was seized with a fit of unnatural laughter which was very near turning into convulsions, for her nerves, after the horrible strain, seemed to have lost their force.

Camors, in whose mind the light had gradually fallen upon the most obscure points of the fatal riddle propounded to him, felt the need of abridging a scene which had strained all his faculties to an almost unendurable pitch. He rose.

“I am obliged to leave you,” he said, “for I do not dine at home; but I will come again to-morrow with your permission.”

“Certainly. Meanwhile, do you authorize me to speak to the general?”

"*Mon Dieu !* yes, for, to speak frankly, I have tried in vain to raise objections ; I can find none."

"Good ; I adore you !" said the marchioness.

She gave him her hand which he kissed. He took his leave at once.

One must have had keener perceptions than General de Campvallon to detect any weakness or discord in the audacious comedy that those two great artists had just enacted before him. The mute play of their eyes alone could have betrayed them, and that he did not see. As for their quiet, unaffected, natural conversation, there was not a word of it that he did not hear, and that did not seem to set all his anxiety at rest and to dispel his suspicions. From that moment and forever, every shadow was swept from his thoughts, for the general's mind was too simple and too pure to conceive the hateful scheme in which Madame de Campvallon had in desperation taken refuge, or to fathom such a depth of guile.

When he left his hiding-place and reappeared before his wife, he was utterly abashed ; he made a gesture indicative of confusion and humility. He took her hand and smiled upon her with all the kindness and affection that his heart could hold. At that moment, the marchioness, her nervous system giving way once more, began to sob, whereupon the general's despair reached its climax. Out of respect for the excellent man we will pass over a scene, which would not have sufficient interest to atone for the pain it would inflict upon honest folk.

We will also pass over without a description the interview that took place the next day between Madame de Campvallon and Monsieur de Camors. Camors, as will be seen, felt at the first appearance of Madame de Tècle's name in that black intrigue a sensation of repugnance, of horror even, which had well-nigh ruined everything. How he succeeded in putting down that last revolt of his conscience to the point of consenting to the expedient which was to assure the tranquillity of his illicit passion ;—by what detestable sophistry he dared to convince himself that he no longer owed anything to anybody but his accomplice and that he owed her everything—even that we will not attempt to explain. To explain is to palliate, and at this point we do not choose to undertake the task. We will say simply that he resigned himself to the marriage. In the path on which he had entered men seldom pause, unless the lightning takes a hand.

As for the marchioness, one must have formed a very erroneous idea of that depraved and domineering creature to be surprised that she should persist, in cold blood and after reflection, in the treacherous scheme that the imminence of the danger had suggested to her. She foresaw that the general's suspicion would spring to life again some day, more threatening than ever if the marriage should remain in the air. She loved Camors passionately, she loved no less the melodramatic mystery of their liaison ; furthermore she had been assailed with a

mad terror at the idea of losing the vast fortune that she had accustomed herself to look upon as her own ; for the disinterestedness of her early youth had been left far behind, and the idea of falling miserably from her throne in that Parisian society, where she reigned by virtue of her magnificence as well as of her beauty, was unbearable to her. Love, mystery, fortune, she was determined to keep them all at any cost, and the more she reflected upon it the more convinced she was that Camors's marriage was the surest safeguard. It is true that she thus set up a species of rival, but she had too high an opinion of herself to fear her, and she preferred Mademoiselle de Tècle to any other, because she knew her and because she was clearly inferior to her at every point.

About a fortnight after this episode, the general appeared at Madame de Tècle's one morning and asked for her daughter's hand in the name of Monsieur de Camors. It would be painful to dwell upon the joy that filled Madame de Tècle's heart. She was, however, secretly astonished that Camors had not come in person to urge his suit ; but Camors had not had the heart to do that. He had been at Reuilly, however, since the morning, and he repaired to Madame de Tècle's as soon as he knew that his suit was favorably received. Having once made up his mind to that monstrous deed, he had determined to carry it through with the utmost delicacy and we know that he was a past master in such matters.

In the evening, after they were left alone, Madame de

Tèle and her daughter walked for a long while on their dear terrace by the soft light of the stars—the daughter blessing her mother, her mother blessing God, both mingling their hearts, their dreams, their kisses, their tears—happier, poor creatures, than it is lawful for mortals to be.

In the month of August following, the marriage was celebrated.



## IV

After a few weeks' residence at Reuilly, the Comte and Comtesse de Camors went to Paris and took up their abode in the count's mansion on Avenue de l'Impératrice. From that moment, and during the months that followed, Madame de Camors kept up a brisk correspondence with her mother. We transcribe here some of her letters which will enable the reader to become speedily and intimately acquainted with the young woman.

MADAME DE CAMORS to MADAME DE TÈCLE.

"October.

"You ask me if I am happy, my dearest mother. No, not happy! But I have wings; I swim in the sky like a bird; I feel the sunlight in my brain, in my eyes, in my heart. It dazzles me, it intoxicates me, it makes me weep divine tears! No, my darling mother, it isn't possible, you see!—When I think that I am his wife, the wife of the man who has reigned in my poor little mind ever since I have had a mind, of the man whom I would

have chosen among all the men in the whole universe ; when I think that I am his wife, that we are bound together forever, how I love life, how I love you, how I love God !

“The Bois and the lake are within a few steps, as you know. We go there to ride almost every morning, my husband and I—see how glibly I say it—‘my husband !’ we ride there, my husband and I, I and my husband ! I don’t know how it happens, but the weather is always fine, even when it rains as it does to-day ; so we have just come home. I ventured to question him in a mild way this morning, during our ride, on certain points of our story which were still obscure to me. Why did he marry me, for example ?

“‘Because you attracted me, evidently, Miss Mary.’

“He likes to call me by that name which reminds him of some incident or other in my shy childhood—I am still shy with him.

“‘If I attracted you, why did you give so little sign of it ?’

“‘Because I didn’t wish to pay court to you until I had definitely decided to marry.’

“‘How could I have attracted you, when I am not at all beautiful ?’

“‘You are not at all beautiful, that is true,’ the cruel man replied ; ‘but you are very pretty, and you are grace itself, like your mother.’

“All those obscure points being cleared up to Miss

Mary's satisfaction, Miss Mary galloped off, not only because it was raining, but because, no one knows why, she had suddenly become as red as a poppy.

"My dearest mother, how sweet it is to be loved by the man one adores, and to be loved precisely as one longs to be, as one dreams of being loved, and precisely according to the programme laid out by one's romantic young heart! Would you ever have believed that I had ideas on such a delicate subject? Yes, mother, I had; for instance, it seemed to me that there must be different ways of loving, some vulgar, some showy, some absurd, some downright laughable, and that our neighbor the prince could not love in any of those ways. He must certainly love like the prince that he was, with grace and dignity, with serious tenderness, a little stern perhaps, kindly, almost condescendingly—like a lover, but like a master—like a master, but like a loving master—in a word, like my husband.

"Dear angel whom I call mother, be happy in my happiness, for it is your work alone! I kiss your hands, I kiss your wings, I thank you, I worship you! If you were with me, it would be too much; I should die of happiness, I think. But come quickly; your room is ready, it is hung in azure like the sky in which I swim. I have told you before, I believe, but I tell you again.

"Good-night, mother of the happiest little woman in the world.

"MISS MARY, COMTESSE DE CAMORS."

“November.

“You make me weep, mother.—I have been expecting you every morning ! However I say nothing to you ; I do not beg you to come. If my grandfather’s health seems to have failed enough to require your presence all the winter, I know that no entreaty would induce you to neglect your duty ; but, in pity’s name, do not exaggerate the danger, my good angel, and remember that your little Mary cannot pass the blue room without a weight at her heart.

“Aside from the disappointment you inflict upon her, she continues to be as happy as you could wish her to be. Her Prince Charming is still charming and still her prince. He takes her to see the monuments, the museums, the theatres, like the poor little provincial she is. Is it not touching from such an important personage ? He is much amused by my ecstasies, for I go into ecstasies. Don’t tell Uncle des Rameures, but Paris is superb. The days count double here, for thinking and for living.

“My husband took me to Versailles yesterday. It seems that that trip to Versailles was rather an absurd escapade in the eyes of the good people here, for I noticed that the Comte de Camors did not say much about it. Versailles did not fail to confirm the idea of it that I got from you. It has not changed since you were there with my grandfather. It is superb, solemn and cold.

“There is a new and very interesting museum, however, in the upper rooms of the palace. It consists

mainly of historical portraits, copies or originals. Nothing has interested me more than to see that procession of all the faces that my imagination has so often tried to evoke, from Charles the Bold to Washington. It seems as if you were in the Elysian Fields and talking with those illustrious dead. You will be glad to know, mother dear, that I explained several things to Monsieur de Camors, who seemed amazed at my knowledge and my intellect. As you can imagine I simply answered his questions; but it seemed to astonish him that I should be able to answer them. In that case, why did he ask them? If he is unable to distinguish between the different Princesses de Conti, it doesn't seem at all strange to me; but if I, on the other hand, am able to distinguish them because my mother taught me to, that doesn't seem strange to me either.

"Afterward, at my urgent request, we dined at a restaurant. Mother, it was the happiest moment of my life! To dine at a restaurant with one's husband is the most delightful of crimes.

"I told you that he seemed surprised at my knowledge. I ought to add that, as a general rule, he seems surprised when I speak. Did he think I was dumb? I speak but little, it is true, for I confess that he frightens me to death. I am so afraid of displeasing him, of seeming silly to him, or pretentious or pedantic! When the day comes, if it ever comes, when I am at my ease with him, and when I can show him what little common sense and

useful knowledge I happen to possess, I shall be relieved of a great weight, for I really think sometimes that he looks on me as a child. The other day, on the boulevard, I had stopped in front of a toy-shop—what a sin!—and when he saw my eyes fixed on an army of gorgeous dolls, he said :

“ ‘ Would you like one, Miss Mary ? ’

“ Wasn’t that horrible, mother ?

“ As for him, he is at home on every subject—except the Princesses de Conti ; he explains everything to me, but briefly, in a few words, in order to have it over with, as one explains a thing to a person with no hope of making him understand it. And yet I understand so well, my poor little mother !

“ ‘ Well, so much the better,’ I say to myself ; ‘ for after all, if he loves me like that, if he loves me when he deems me an idiot, what will it be later ? ’—*I love you excessively.*”

“ December.

“ People are returning to Paris, dear mother, and for the past fortnight I have been entirely engrossed in making calls. It is not the custom here for men to make them ; but my husband has to take me for the first time to the people I am expected to know. So he accompanies me, which entertains me much more than him, I fancy. He is more serious than usual, the only symptom of ill-humor that that amiable creature ever exhibits. I am regarded with some interest. The woman whom his

lordship has honored with his choice is evidently the object of intense curiosity. That flatters and frightens me at the same time. I blush, I am ill at ease and constrained. So people consider me ugly and foolish. They open their eyes in amazement. They imagine that he married me for my money. I long to cry. We go back to the carriage; he smiles at me and I am in Heaven. That is what our calls are like.

“You must know, dearest mamma, that Madame de Campvallon is divinely kind to me. She often takes me to her box at the Italiens, as mine will not be free until January 1st. Yesterday she gave a little party for me in her beautiful salons. The general opened the ball with me. Such a splendid man! I love him because he admires you. The marchioness introduced the best dancers to me. They were young gentlemen whose linen was cut so low that it made me shudder. I had never seen men décolleté; it isn’t nice. It is plain, however, that they think themselves delightful and necessary. They have a thoughtful, important expression, a disdainful, conquering eye, and their mouths are always open so that they can breathe more freely; their coat-tails spread out and flutter like a pair of wings. They seize your waist, mother, as if it were their own property, warn you with a glance that they propose to do you the honor of whisking you off, and away you go; when they are out of breath, they warn you with a glance that they propose to do you the favor of stopping, and



they stop ; they rest a moment, breathe hard, smile and show their teeth ; another glance, and off they go again. They are adorable creatures.

“ Louis waltzed with me and seemed satisfied. I saw him waltz with the marchioness, for the first time ; mother, it was like a dance of two stars. One thing that impressed me deeply on that occasion and on some others is the visible idolatry which the women offer my husband. That, my darling mother, is horrible to me. Once more I asked myself the question : ‘ Why did he choose me ? What attraction can I have for him ? and shall I be able to contend against them ? ’ The result of all my meditations was the following idiocy, the purpose of which was to reassure myself a little.

*Portrait of the Comtesse de Camors, as drawn by herself.*

“ ‘ The Comtesse de Camors, *née* Marie de Tècle, is a young person who has just reached her twentieth year and has much common-sense for her age. She is not beautiful, as her husband is the first to admit : he says that she is pretty. She doubts it. This is why. In the first place she has endless legs, but that was a defect of the huntress Diana, and perhaps it gives the countess’s step a lightness it would not otherwise have ; her waist is naturally short, but in the saddle that is an advantage ; of medium stoutness ; irregular features, mouth too large, lips too thick ; a shadow of a moustache, alas ! teeth that are white, luckily, although not very small ; nose of

medium size, a little too open ; her mother's eyes : they are her best feature ; eyebrows like those of her great-uncle Des Rameures, which give her a harsh expression, contradicted luckily by the general expression of her countenance and above all by her softness of heart ; her mother's dark complexion, but it is becoming to her mother and not so becoming to her ; black hair, with a bluish tinge, very thick and truly magnificent. As a whole, one hardly knows what to think of her.'

"That portrait, intended to reassure me, did not reassure me at all, but had the contrary effect, for it seems to me to convey the idea of a sort of old hag.

"I would like to be the loveliest, I would like to be the most distinguished, I would like to be the most fascinating of women, O my mother ! but, if I please him, I am the most overjoyed of women ! Thank God, he seems to think me better than I am, for men haven't the same taste that we have in such matters. For instance I cannot understand why he hasn't more admiration for the Marquise de Campvallon. He is cold to her. If I had been a man, I should have been wild over Madame de Campvallon.

"Good night, best beloved of mothers."

"January.

"You scold me, dearest mother. The tone of my letter has wounded you. You cannot understand how I can think so much of my external appearance as to try

to describe it and draw comparisons. There is something paltry and frivolous about it that offends you. How can I imagine that a man should be attracted solely by physical charms, and qualities of mind and heart be nothing to him? But, my dear mother, even assuming that your daughter possesses those qualities of mind and heart, what possible good can they do her, if she has neither the courage nor the opportunity to exhibit them? And, even if the necessary courage should come, I really begin to believe that the opportunity would always be lacking; for I must admit that this lovely Paris is not perfect, and that I am gradually discovering spots upon this sun. Paris is a beautiful place, but it's a great pity that there are any people living in it: not that they are not agreeable, they are too agreeable; but they are also too absent-minded, and, as far as I am able to make out, they live and die without thinking about what they are doing. It isn't their fault, for they haven't the time. Although they never leave Paris, they are everlasting travellers, constantly scattered by restlessness and curiosity. Other travellers, when they have visited some interesting corner of the world and forgotten their house, their family, their fireside for a month or two, return home and settle down; the Parisians, never. Their life is one long journey. They have no home. Everything that is a main object of life elsewhere becomes secondary to them. They have their domicile, their household, their room, as people do everywhere; they must, of

course. There are husbands and fathers, wives and mothers in Paris, as there are everywhere ; of course there must be ; but such matters, my poor mother, are kept in the background as much as possible. The interest of life is not in the family, but in the streets, the museums, the salons, the theatres, the clubs, in that vast external life which is constantly in motion, night and day, in Paris ; which attracts you, excites you, steals your time, your mind, your heart, and devours everything. It is the best place in the world to visit and the worst to live in.

“Do you understand now, my dearest mother, why, as I looked about to see by what qualities I could fast bind my husband, who is of course the best of men, but of Parisian men, I thought by some fatality of the merits which can be grasped at once and which do not require study to be discovered?

“But you are quite right, it was degrading, unworthy of you and of myself ; for you know that I am not in reality a cowardly young person. Most certainly, if I could have kept Monsieur de Camors shut up for a year or two in some old château in the heart of a desolate forest, it would have seemed very agreeable to me ; I should have seen him oftener, I should have become acquainted more promptly with his august personality, and I should have had an opportunity to develop my poor talents before his fascinated eyes ; but, in the first place, that might have bored him, and in the second place it would have

been too simple, really. Life and happiness are not to be arranged so easily, I am sure. On all sides there is difficulty, danger, contention. And so, what joy to triumph! I promise you, mother, that I will triumph, that I will compel him to know me as you know me, and to love me, not only as he loves me now but as you love me, for good reasons of all sorts of which he has no suspicion as yet.

“Not that he considers me an utter simpleton: it seems to me that he has abandoned that idea within two days. My husband has for his secretary one Vautrot; the name is an ugly one, but the man is rather handsome; but I don't like his shifty glance. Monsieur Vautrot lives with us, so to speak: he arrives at daybreak, breakfasts somewhere or other in the neighborhood, passes the day in Louis's study and sometimes remains to dinner with us, when he has any work to finish in the evening. He is a very well-informed individual; he knows a little of everything. He tried all manner of professions, I believe, before accepting the subordinate but lucrative position he occupies with my husband. He loves literature, but not the literature of his own time and his own country, which he considers beneath contempt, perhaps because he has not succeeded in it. He prefers foreign writers and poets; he quotes them aptly enough, but with too much emphasis. His early education was evidently neglected, for he says on every occasion, when speaking to us: ‘Yes, monsieur le comte; yes, madame

la comtesse,' like a servant, and yet he is very proud or rather, very vain. His capital fault, in my eyes, is a sort of superior sneer which he affects as soon as religion or any analogous subject is touched upon.

"Two days ago, during dinner, when he, contrary to every canon of good taste, indulged in a little sally of that sort, my husband said to him :

" 'My dear Vautrot, such jests are indifferent to me ; but, although you may be strong-minded, my wife is weak-minded, and strength, as you know, should respect weakness.'

"Monsieur Vautrot turned red and white and green, bowed awkwardly to me and left the room almost immediately. I have noticed since then that he has shown more reserve in my presence.

"As soon as I was alone with Louis, I said to him :

" 'You will consider me very presumptuous, but I am wondering how you can entrust all your business and all your secrets to a man who has no principle?'

" 'Oh !' said Monsieur de Camors, 'he swaggers like that, thinking to make himself interesting in your eyes, by his Mephistophelian airs ; he's an excellent fellow at bottom.'

" 'But he believes in nothing, does he?' I persisted.

" 'Not in much of anything, it is true ! but he has never betrayed my confidence. He is a man of honor.'

"I opened my mother's eyes as far as they would go.

" 'Well, what is it, Miss Mary?'

“ ‘What is honor, monsieur?’ ”

“ ‘I will ask you the same question, Miss Mary.’ ”

“ ‘*Mon Dieu !*’ I said, blushing to my ears, ‘I haven’t any clear idea ; but I imagine that honor apart from morality amounts to little, and that morality apart from religion amounts to nothing at all. They all form a chain ; honor hangs from the last link like a flower ; but, if the chain is broken, the flower falls with the rest.’ ”

“He looked me straight in the eye, mother, with a very odd expression, as if he were not only confused, but almost perturbed by my philosophy ; then he sighed softly and simply said as he rose :

“ ‘A very pretty definition that.’ ”

“Whereupon we went to the play, and he stuffed me during the whole evening with bonbons and oranges glacées.

“Madame de Campvallon was with us. I asked her to take me up the next day as she passed on her way to the Bois, for she is my idol ; she is so lovely and so distinguée ! She smells sweet. I am happy when I am with her. As we were driving home from the theatre, Louis was very silent, contrary to his usual custom. At last he said to me abruptly :

“ ‘Marie, are you going to the Bois with the marchioness to-morrow?’ ”

“ ‘Yes.’ ”

“ ‘It’s all right ; but it seems to me you see each other rather frequently. Morning and evening—you are never apart !’ ”



“ ‘ *Mon Dieu !* I thought that you liked to have me with her. Isn't Madame de Campvallon a pleasant relation ? ’

“ ‘ Exceedingly so ; but, as a general rule, I don't like friendships between women. However, I was wrong to speak to you about it ; you have wit and good judgment enough to keep within bounds. ’

“ That is what he said to me, mother. I embrace you. ”

“ March.

“ I hoped not to bore you again this year, mother, with descriptions of fêtes, festoons, astragals and candelabra, for Lent has come at last. To-day is Ash-Wednesday. But we are to dance at Madame d'Oilly's, the day after to-morrow, dear mother. I did not want to go ; but I saw that it would annoy Louis, and I was afraid too, of wounding Madame d'Oilly, who was almost a mother to him. Moreover, Lent here is but an empty word. It makes me sigh ; when will they stop, pray ? when will they cease to amuse themselves, *mon Dieu ?*

“ My darling mother, I must admit that I am altogether too dissipated to be happy. I counted on Lent to some extent, and behold ! it is effaced from the calendar. Dear Lent ! what a sweet, spiritual, virtuous conception ! how strong and sensible religion is ! how well it knows human weakness and folly ! what foresight in its laws ! And what indulgence too ! for to impose limits upon pleasure is to pardon it. I, too, love pleasure, the lovely

dresses that make us look like flowers, the brilliant salons, the music, the festal air, the dancing. Yes, I am very fond of it all, I feel its fascinating unrest, I feel its intoxication ; but there is no end !—Paris in winter, watering places in summer, always the same hurly-burly, the unrest and the excitement ; there gets to be somewhat of the savage, of the negro, and, if I dared to say the word, something bestial about it all. Poor Lent ! it foresaw it. It did not say to us simply, as the priest said to me this morning : ‘ Remember that thou art dust ; ’ it said : ‘ Remember that thou hast a soul ; remember that thou hast duties, that thou hast a husband, a child, a mother, a God ! ’ And then, mother, people withdrew to their families, to the shadow of the old home ; they lived in serious thought, between the church and the house, they talked on lofty and sacred subjects ; they returned to the world of morality, they regained their foothold in Heaven. It was a salutary interval which prevented dissipation from ever degenerating into sottishness, pleasure into convulsions, and one’s winter mask from becoming one’s real face.

“ This is Madame Jaubert’s opinion.—Who is Madame Jaubert ? She is a virtuous little Parisian whom my mother will love dearly. I met her nearly everywhere for several months, particularly at Saint-Philippe-du-Roule, without a suspicion that she was my neighbor and that her house adjoined ours. Such is Paris. She is a charming woman, with a sweet, affectionate but cour-

ageous air. We always sat beside each other, instinctively. We cast stealthy glances at each other. We pushed back our chairs to let each other pass and we said in our sweetest tones : ‘ O madame ! ’ ‘ Excuse me, madame ! ’ I dropped my glove and she picked it up. — ‘ Oh ! thanks, madame ! ’ I offered her holy water. ‘ Oh ! dear madame ! ’ with a smile. When our carriages met by the lake, a little bow and another smile. One day, at the concert at the Tuileries, we spied each other at a distance and our faces beamed : as soon as we heard anything that pleased us, we glanced quickly at each other—always with that smile on our lips. Imagine my surprise the other morning, when I saw my sympathetic friend enter the little Italian house within two steps of ours, and enter as if she were at home. I made inquiries. She is Madame Jaubert. Her husband is a tall, fair young man and a civil engineer. Behold me seized with an overpowering desire to call on my neighbor. I broached the subject to Louis, not without a blush, for I remembered that he doesn’t like friendships between women ; but before everything he loves me. However, he shrugged his shoulders a trifle.

“ ‘ Let me find out something about the people first.’

“ He did so. A few days later, he said :

“ ‘ Miss Mary, you may call on Madame Jaubert ; she is a very eligible person.’

“ I first leaped upon Monsieur de Camors’s neck and from there ran to Madame Jaubert’s.—‘ It is I, madame ! ’

—‘Oh ! madame !’—‘Will you allow me, madame?’—  
‘Oh ! yes, yes, madame !’—We embraced, mother, and  
we were old friends in a moment.

“Her husband, as I said, is a civil engineer. He is busy over great inventions, great industrial undertakings ; but it has not long been so, mother. As a result of inheriting a large fortune, he abandoned his studies and devoted himself to doing nothing at all, except evil, of course. About that time he married to round out his fortune. His pretty little wife had some sad surprises. He was never at home. Always at the club, in the wings, in the devil’s clutches. He gambled, he had mistresses, and—it was horrible, mother—he drank. He went home to his wife, drunk. A simple detail that my pen almost refuses to write, will give you an accurate idea of the man. One day he insisted on going to bed with his boots on. Such, dear mother, was the estimable gentleman whom my little friend has gradually transformed into a respectable man, a man of solid worth and an excellent husband, by dint of gentleness, firmness, good judgment and tact. Tell me, is it not encouraging? for God knows that my task is much less difficult ; but that household is my delight, because it proves to me that such a nest as I dream of can really be built here in the heart of Paris. These pleasant neighbors of mine live in Paris ; they are not its victims ; they have a home, they own each other, they belong to each other. Paris is at their door, and that is a great advantage. It is an

always accessible spring of dignified diversions which they enjoy in common; but they drink at it, and do not drown themselves in it. Their habits are identical; they pass the evening at home, they read, they draw, they talk, they stir their fire, they listen to the wind and the rain, as if they were in a forest; they feel life passing through their fingers strand by strand, as we used to do in our dear evenings in the country. They are happy, mother.

“This then is my dream and this is my plan. My husband has none of the vices Monsieur Jaubert had. He simply has habits, the habits of all the men of his set in Paris. What I aspire to do, my dearest mother, is to transform them by gentle stages, to suggest to him insensibly the astounding idea that a man may pass an evening at home, with his beloved and loving wife, without dying of consumption. The rest will come in due time. By the rest I mean the taste for a quiet life, the serious joys of the little domestic cloister, the family sentiment, the meditative mind, the soul that has ceased to stray; am I not right, my good angel? Rely upon me, for I am more than ever overflowing with ardor, confidence and courage. In the first place, he loves me with all his heart, although perhaps with less earnestness than I deserve. He loves me, he spoils me, he overwhelms me with kindness. There is not a pleasure that he does not give me, except, be it understood, the pleasure of remaining at home. He loves me then; that comes

first;—in the second place, mother, there is something that makes me laugh and weep at the same time. It really has seemed to me for some time past, that I have two hearts, one great heart of my own and another smaller one— Oh! *mon Dieu!* my mother is weeping. But, my darling, it is a great mystery—a dream of Heaven, but perhaps only a dream which cannot be whispered as yet to one's husband or to anybody except one's adored mother. Pray do not weep, for it is not certain.

“The guilty MISS MARY.”

In answer to this letter Madame de Camors received one two days later announcing the death of her grandfather. The Comte de Tècle had succumbed to a stroke of apoplexy which had long been expected on account of the state of his health. Madame de Tècle, foreseeing that her daughter's first impulse would be to join her and share her sorrow, urged her most earnestly to spare herself the fatiguing journey. She promised to come to her in Paris as soon as she had attended to some matters of business that required her presence.

The family mourning had the natural effect of augmenting the feeling of discomfort and vague melancholy in the Comtesse de Camors's heart, of which her last letters had betrayed some symptoms, although they were disguised and suppressed by the precautions of her filial love. She was much less happy than she told her mother, for the early enthusiasm and early illusions of her married

life had not long deceived a mind so keen and straightforward as hers. A young girl when she enters the marriage state is easily deceived as to the extent of the affection of which she is the object. It rarely happens that she does not adore her husband and believe that he adores her, simply because he marries her. The young heart opens and pours forth all the charms, all the sweet perfumes, all the songs of love, and, as it is enveloped in that celestial cloud, all about it is love ; but little by little it emerges from the cloud, and too often discovers that the concert and the emotions that enthralled it proceeded from itself alone.

Such, so far as the pen can describe the shades of thought in the female mind, such was the impression that had, from day to day made its way into poor Miss Mary's gentle soul : that was the whole, but to her it was much. The thought of being betrayed by her husband, and especially of being betrayed with the cruel premeditation which we have seen, had never so much as breathed upon her mind ; and yet, through all his kindly consideration and attentions, which she had in no wise exaggerated in her letters to her mother, she felt that he was a little contemptuous and indifferent. Marriage had made practically no change in his habits : he dined at home instead of dining at the club, that was all. She believed none the less that he loved her, but with an absence of seriousness that was almost insulting.

And yet, although she was sad, sometimes almost to



the point of shedding tears, we have seen that she did not despair, and that her stout little heart clung with fearless confidence to all the lucky chances that the future might have in store for her.

Monsieur de Camors was as may be imagined, quite indifferent to the emotions by which his young wife was torn. He had no suspicion of them. He was, for his own part, very happy, strange as it may appear. The marriage had been a painful step to take; but, when he was once at home in his sin, he made himself comfortable there. His conscience, however, hardened as it was, apparently had some sensitive fibres still, and the reader will not have failed to notice that he thought that he owed his wife some compensations.

His feeling for her was a compound of a sort of indifference and a sort of compassion. In a vague way he pitied the child whose life was caught and shattered between two destinies of a higher order. He hoped that she would always remain in ignorance of the fate to which he had condemned her, and he had resolved to leave nothing undone to lessen its harshness; but he belonged body and soul, and more absolutely than ever, to the passion that had been the supreme crime of his life: for his intrigue with the Marquise de Campvallou, being constantly stirred to new life by the mystery and danger attending it, and being managed with consummate art by a woman whose adroitness equalled her redoubtable beauty, retained, after years, the ideal charm of its first hours.

The graceful courtesy with which Monsieur de Camors prided himself upon treating his wife had its limits however. The young countess so discovered when she tried to abuse it. For instance, on several occasions she feigned fatigue as an excuse for declining any sort of diversion away from home in the evening, hoping that her husband would not leave her alone. That was an error. Monsieur de Camors did on those occasions grant her a few moments' tête-à-tête after dinner; but about nine o'clock he left her, with perfect tranquillity. To be sure, an hour later, a package of bonbons would arrive or a basket of delicious little cakes, which assisted her in some degree to while away the evening. Sometimes she shared the sweetmeats with her neighbor Madame Jaubert, sometimes with her husband's secretary, Monsieur Vautrot. This Vautrot, to whom she had at first taken a strong dislike, had gradually made his way into her good graces. In her husband's absence, she found him always at hand, she had recourse to him in many trifling matters, addresses, invitations, purchases of books, music and stationery. Hence there arose a sort of familiarity. She began to call him "Vautrot" or "my good Vautrot."—Vautrot did her errands with marked zeal. He manifested much assiduity in her service and much respect for her, and carefully abstained before her from the sceptical sallies that he knew to be offensive to her. She was delighted at the change in him, and to show her gratitude she

kept him with her several times in the evening, when he came to ask if she had any commissions for him. She talked with him about books or the theatre.

When she was really confined to the house by her mourning, Monsieur de Camors did her the favor to stay with her until ten o'clock the first two evenings; but that effort exhausted him, and the poor young wife, who had already built a whole future upon that fragile foundation, was doomed to see him resume his bachelor habits the third evening. She felt the blow, and her melancholy became more serious than it had hitherto been. Solitude was painful to her. She had had no time to form intimate friendships in Paris. Madame Jaubert came to her assistance as much as she could; but in the intervals the countess fell more and more into the habit of detaining Vautrot, and even of sending for him; Camors himself, three-fourths of the time, brought him to her before going out.

"I bring you Vautrot, my dear, with Shakespeare; you can soar aloft together."

Vautrot read very well, although with a declamatory solemnity which sometimes secretly amused the countess. However, it was one way of killing the long evenings pending Madame de Tècle's arrival. Moreover, Vautrot seemed so touched when she kept him with her, so disappointed when she allowed him to go, that, from sheer kindness of heart, she would sometimes motion to him to take a seat, even when he bored her.

One evening in the month of April, about ten o'clock, Monsieur Vautrot was alone with the Comtesse de Camors and was reading Goethe's *Faust* which she did not know. The reading seemed to have triumphed over the young woman's individual troubles: she was listening with more than usual attention, her eyes fixed intently upon the reader; but she was not simply captivated by the power of the work, she was, as often happens, following her own thoughts and her own story through the poet's great conception, and we know with what extraordinary clearness of vision a mind intent upon a fixed idea discovers allusions and points of resemblance that are invisible to any other. Madame de Camors detected doubtless some similarity between her husband and Doctor Faust, between herself and Marguerite, for the drama excited her strangely and she could not restrain the outbreak of her emotion when Marguerite, in her dungeon, uttered that wail of distress and madness: "Who gave thee this power over me, hangman?—I am so young! so young! and to die so soon!—Oh! spare me; what have I done to you? Now am I wholly in your power. Let me but nurse my child once more. I rocked him upon my heart all night. They took him from me, the better to torture me, and now they say that I have killed him.—Never shall I be joyful more! never more!"

What a medley of confused sensations, overwhelming compassion and vague apprehension suddenly poured in

upon the young wife's heart until it overflowed, one can hardly imagine ; but she threw herself back in her chair and closed her lovely eyes, as if to keep back the tears that trickled through the fringe of her long lashes. At that moment Monsieur Vautrot abruptly ceased reading ; he heaved a deep sigh, knelt in front of the Comtesse de Camors, took her hand in his, and said :

“ Poor angel ! ”

It will be difficult to understand this incident and its consequences, which unfortunately were very serious, unless we insert here, by way of parenthesis, the moral and physical portrait of Monsieur Vautrot.

Monsieur Hippolyte Vautrot was a handsome man, and he knew it.—Indeed he flattered himself that he bore some resemblance to his employer, the Comte de Camors, and nature being aided by his constant efforts to copy him, his claim was not without some basis of fact. He resembled Camors externally as closely as a vulgar man can resemble a man of the utmost refinement and distinction.—Vautrot was the son of a petty provincial functionary. He had received from his father a substantial fortune which he had squandered in the varied enterprises of his adventurous life. College influences had sent him at first to a religious institution. He had left it to go to Paris, where he had studied law. He had worked in a solicitor's office ; then he had tried his hand at letters and had met with no success. He had speculated on the Bourse and had lost. He had knocked in

a sort of feverish impatience at all the doors to fortune one after another, he was fated not to succeed, because his ambition in every direction was unbounded and his talents mediocre. He was fitted for subordinate positions only and he would not accept them. He would have made a good school teacher, but he wanted to be a poet ; a good country curé, but he wanted to be a bishop ; an excellent government clerk, but he wanted to be a minister. In short, he wanted to be a great man, and he was not. He had become a hypocrite, which is much easier, and, supported on the one side by Madame d'Oilly's philosophic circle, and on the other by Madame de la Roche-Jugan's orthodox circle, he had made his way to the post of secretary to Camors, who, in his general contempt for his fellow-men, had considered him as good as another.

Familiar association with Monsieur de Camors had been, from a moral standpoint, very injurious to Monsieur Vautrot. It had, it is true, relieved him of his mask of piety, which was hardly adapted to the surroundings, but it had enriched to a lamentable degree the substratum of cynical depravity which the disappointments and the resentment of wounded pride had deposited in that cankered heart. It can hardly be supposed that Monsieur de Camors had had the wretched taste to undertake deliberately to debauch his secretary ; but daily contact and association with him, taken in conjunction with his example, had sufficed. A secretary is always a confidential man to a greater or less extent : he divines

what is not confided to him. Vautrot therefore could not fail to discover very soon that his employer did not sin morally because his principles were too high, in politics because he adhered to his convictions, in business because he was overscrupulous. The intellectual, refined, haughty superiority of Camors dazzled Vautrot and completed his moral corruption by exhibiting evil to him not only prosperous, but resplendent with charm and prestige. So it was that he had a profound admiration for his master ; he admired him, he copied him and he hated him. Camors felt for him and his solemn airs a considerable measure of disdain, which he did not always take the trouble to conceal ; and Vautrot shuddered to the very marrow when some icy sarcasm fell from such a height upon the quivering wound of his vanity. But that was a slight grievance ; what he detested above everything in Camors was his easy, insolent triumph, his rapid, undeserved rise, all forms of earthly enjoyment acquired without trouble, without labor, without conscience, and devoured in peace ; in a word, what he detested was what he had dreamed of for himself but had been unable to secure.

Assuredly Monsieur Vautrot was no exception in that respect, and such examples when they are presented even to the soundest minds, are not salutary ; for we must venture to say to those who, like Monsieur de Camors, trample everything under foot, and who expect nevertheless that their secretaries, their workmen, their



servants, their wives and their children will remain virtuous,—we must venture to say to them that they are mistaken.

Such then was Monsieur Vautrot. At this time he was forty years old ; that is an age at which men not infrequently become very depraved, even when they have been passably wicked before. He made a show of austere, puritanical manners. He had a favorite café where he was king. He passed judgment on his contemporaries there and found them all of moderate talents. He was a hard man to please ; in the matter of courage he demanded heroism ; in the matter of talent, genius ; in the matter of art, high art. His political opinions were those of Erostratus, with this difference, altogether to the advantage of the ancient philosopher, that Vautrot, after burning the temple, would have pillaged it.—In a word, he was a fool, but a fool of the most maleficent variety.

If Monsieur de Camors, as he left his sumptuous study that evening, had been ill-bred enough to put his eye to the keyhole, he would have been greatly surprised : he would have seen Monsieur Vautrot go to a handsome Italian secretary incrustéd with ivory, fumble in the drawers, and finally open with the greatest ease a very complicated lock, the key to which Monsieur de Camors had in his pocket at that moment. It was after that investigation by Monsieur Vautrot that he repaired, accompanied by *Faust*, to the boudoir of the young

countess, at whose feet we have left him for a long while.

Madame de Camors had closed her eyes to conceal her tears; she opened them the instant that Vautrot seized her hand and called her "Poor angel!" Seeing him at her feet, she was completely nonplussed, and said to him simply:

"Are you mad, Vautrot?"

"Yes, I am mad," cried Vautrot, throwing back his hair with a poetic gesture familiar to him, "yes, mad with love and pity! for I know what your suffering must be, O pure and noble-hearted victim! I know the source of your tears; let them flow with full confidence upon a heart that is devoted to you to the death!"

Even if she had wished to do so, the young countess could not have let her tears flow on Monsieur Vautrot's heart, for her eyes had suddenly become dry. A man on his knees at a woman's feet must inevitably appear to her sublime or ridiculous. Unfortunately it was in the last light that Monsieur Vautrot's attitude, at once awkward and theatrical, impressed Madame de Camors's fun-loving imagination. Her charming face lighted up in an outburst of keen amusement; she bit her lips in order not to laugh, but, in spite of herself, she laughed heartily.

A man should not kneel unless he is reasonably certain of rising from his knees victorious. Otherwise he runs the risk of cutting a pitiful figure, as Vautrot did.

"Rise, my good Vautrot," said Madame de Camors at last, in a serious tone. "Your reading evidently turned your brain. Go and rest. Let us forget this; but don't forget yourself again."

Vautrot rose. He was livid.

"Madame la comtesse," he said, "the love of a man of heart is never an insult. Mine at least was sincere; mine would have been loyal,—mine was not an infamous snare!"

There was such evident purpose in the tone in which the words were uttered, that the young woman's features instantly changed. She sat up in her chair.

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"Alas! Nothing that you do not know, I think," said Vautrot.

She rose.

"You will explain your meaning to me instantly, monsieur, or you will explain it to my husband in a moment."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Vautrot, with a semblance of sincerity, "your sadness, your tears led me to think that you knew—"

"What?" she demanded. And, as he did not reply, she added:

"Why do you not speak, villain?"

"I am not a villain," said Vautrot; "I loved you and I pitied you, that's all."

"Why pity me?"

Vautrot was utterly unprepared for the imperious vigor of her character and her speech. He hastily reflected that, having gone as far as he had, the surest way for him was to go on to the end. He thereupon took from his pocket a letter with which he had provided himself simply to confirm, if necessary, in the countess's mind the suspicions which he supposed to have been aroused long before, and he handed the letter to her unfolded. She hesitated a moment, then seized it.—It needed but a glance for her to recognize the handwriting, for she often exchanged notes with Madame de Campvallon. The letter, written in a tone of burning passion, ended with these words: "Still a little jealous of Mary. Almost sorry that I gave her to you, for she is pretty; but I am beautiful, am I not, my beloved?—Above all things, I adore you!"

The young woman had become horribly pale on reading the first words; when she finished, a stifled exclamation escaped her; then she re-read the letter, handed it back to Vautrot as if not knowing what she was doing, and stood for some minutes motionless, her eyes fixed on vacancy. A whole world was crumbling away within her.

Suddenly she walked swiftly to a door and entered her bedroom, where Vautrot heard her hurriedly opening and closing drawers. She reappeared a moment later; she had put on a hat and cloak. She crossed the boudoir at the same hasty, rigid gait; Vautrot, dismayed, tried to stop her.

"Madame !" he said, placing himself in front of her.

She gently pushed him aside with her hand and left the boudoir.

Quarter of an hour later, she was on Avenue des Champs-Élysées, going toward Paris. It was then eleven o'clock. It was a cold April night and the rain was falling in frozen drops. The few people who were still abroad on the broad, damp thoroughfare turned and looked curiously after the handsomely dressed young woman whose pace seemed to indicate that a question of life or death depended upon her speed ; but in Paris people are surprised at nothing, for they see everything there. Madame de Camors's strange appearance therefore attracted no unusual attention ; some men smiled, others made jocose remarks which she did not hear.

With the same convulsive haste she crossed Place de la Concorde toward the bridge. When she reached the bridge and heard the plashing of the swollen, slimy waters of the Seine against the pillars of the arches, she stopped abruptly : she leaned over the parapet and looked at the water ; then she shook her head, sighed heavily and went on. Soon after, she stopped on Rue Vanneau in front of a large house separated from the neighboring houses by a garden wall : it was Madame de Campvalon's house.

When she reached that point, the unhappy child did not know what to do next. Indeed, why had she come there ? She did not know ! She had felt that she must

come to make sure of her misfortune, to touch it with her finger, or perhaps to find some reason, some excuse for doubting it. That was the goal she had proposed to herself, she had arrived there, and she knew not what more to do.

She sat down upon a stone in front of the garden, hid her face in her hands and tried to think. The street was deserted. It was after midnight. A sudden rain-squall had burst upon Paris and the poor woman was shivering.

A policeman passed, wrapped in his cloak ; he took her by the arm.

"What are you doing here?" he asked roughly.

She looked at him.

"I don't know," she said.

The man was moved to pity. Besides, he quickly detected, beneath the young woman's dishevelled attire, the refinement and, as it were, the perfume of virtue.

"But you can't stay here, madame," he said, more gently.

"No."

"You have had some great trouble?"

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Comtesse de Camors."

"Where do you live?"

She gave her address.

"Very good ; wait a moment, madame."

He walked away a few steps, then stopped as he heard the wheels of an approaching cab. The cab was empty. He requested Madame de Camors to enter. She complied and he took his place beside the driver.

Monsieur de Camors had returned and was listening in stupefied amazement to the maid's story of the countess's mysterious disappearance, when the door-bell rang. He rushed down and met his wife on the stairs. She had recovered her self-possession in a measure while driving home. As he questioned her with a searching glance, she said, striving hard to smile :

"I was feeling a little indisposed, I wanted a little air. I don't know the streets and I lost my way."

Despite the improbability of the explanation, he did not persist ; he murmured a few words of gentle chiding and put her into the hands of her maid, who made haste to remove her damp clothes.—Meanwhile he took the police officer aside—he was waiting in the vestibule—and questioned him. When he learned on what street, and at what precise point on that street, the man had found her, Monsieur de Camors, without the need of further enlightenment, at once comprehended the truth.

He went up to his wife's room. She was in bed and trembling in every limb. One hand was hanging over the side of the bed. He tried to take it. She gently withdrew her hand, with sad but dignified firmness. That simple gesture separated them for ever. From that



moment, by a tacit agreement, exacted by her, accepted by him, Madame de Camors was a widow.

He stood for some moments motionless, his glances wandering about in the shadow of the curtains; then he walked slowly across the silent room. The idea of defending himself by lying did not occur to him. His step was calm and measured; but two bluish circles had suddenly appeared under his eyes and his face had assumed the dead pallor of wax. His hands clasped behind him, were twisting convulsively and the ring he wore on his finger broke. He stopped at intervals and listened to the chattering of his young wife's teeth.

After half an hour, he suddenly approached the bed.

"Marie!" he said in a whisper.

She turned her eyes, gleaming with fever, upon him.

"Marie," he continued, "I cannot tell what you may know, and I do not ask you. I have been very culpable toward you, but less so than you think, I doubt not. A terrible chain of circumstances controlled my action. However, I do not try to excuse myself. Judge me as severely as you choose, but, I implore you, calm yourself, take care of yourself. You spoke to me this morning of your presentiments, your hope of becoming a mother. Fix your mind on that thought. You shall be mistress of your life. As for myself, I will be to you whatever you please—a stranger or a friend. Now—I feel that my presence annoys you—and yet I cannot bear

to leave you alone in this condition. Would you like to see Madame Jaubert to-night?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"I will go and bring her to you. I need not tell you that there are secrets which one does not confide to one's dearest friend!"

"Except one's mother?" she asked with an expression of agonized entreaty.

He became even paler than before.

"Except your mother, so be it," he rejoined after a moment's pause. "Your mother comes to-morrow, does she not?"

She moved her head in assent.

"You will arrange matters with her as you choose, and I will agree to everything."

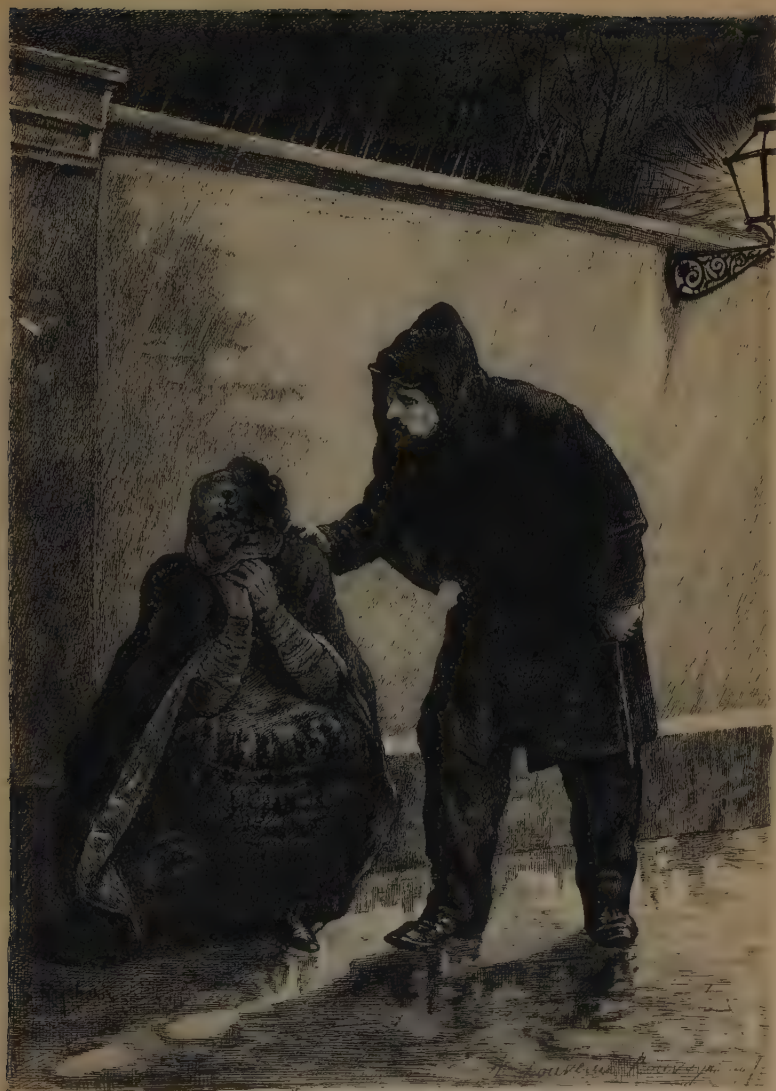
"Thanks," she said feebly.

He left the room at once. He went himself to see Madame Jaubert, who was called out of bed, and told her briefly that his wife had had a severe hysterical attack as the result of a chill. Obliging little Madame Jaubert hurried off to her friend and passed the night with her. She was not long deceived by the explanation Camors had given her. Women soon understand each other in their sorrows. Madame Jaubert, however, asked for no confidences and received none; but her affectionate heart rendered her friend the only service it could render her during that ghastly night; it made her shed tears.

The night was not a very pleasant one to Monsieur de Camors. He took no rest. He paced up and down his apartment till daybreak in a sort of frenzy. The poor child's distress had torn his heart. Past memories awaking at the same time, the apprehension of the morrow evoked the mother who would stand beside her outraged daughter—and such a mother!—all her cherished illusions, all her beliefs, all the joys of her life, utterly crushed; he felt that there were still in his heart spots keenly sensitive to pity, and in his conscience, to remorse. He was irritated at his weakness, but could not escape it.

Who had betrayed him? That question disturbed him to an almost equal degree. From the first instant he had made no mistake as to one point. His wife's sudden, half-insane grief, her desperate attitude, her silence, could be explained only by a certain conviction, by a decisive disclosure.

After his suspicions had gone astray in various directions for some time, he at last became convinced in his own mind that Madame de Campvallon's letters alone could have shed such a bright light upon his wife's mind. He never wrote to the marchioness for his own part; but he had been unable to prevent her writing to him. To Madame de Campvallon, as to the majority of women, a love affair without letters was incomplete. Monsieur de Camors's mistake, inexcusable in a man so shrewd as he, consisted in keeping her letters; but no one is perfect:





he was an artist, and he loved those *chefs-d'œuvre* of impassioned eloquence ; he was proud of having inspired them and he could not make up his mind to burn them.—He hastily examined the secret drawer in which he kept them : by certain signs artfully contrived, he saw that the drawer had been tampered with.—But no letter was missing ; they simply were not arranged in order.

His thoughts had already turned more than once upon Vautrot, of whose scrupulousness he was by no means sure, when, during the morning, he received a note from him which removed all doubt. In fact Monsieur Vautrot, after passing a by no means agreeable night, felt that he had not the courage to face the reception his master might have in store for him that morning. His note was written with sufficient skill not to arouse suspicion, if by chance it were not already aroused, and if the countess had not betrayed him. He announced that he had accepted an important position that had been offered him by a business house in London. He had been obliged to decide immediately and to start that morning or lose an opportunity that would not occur again. He ended by the most lavish expressions of gratitude and regret.

Camors, being unable to strangle him, determined to pay him. He sent him not only some arrears of salary but a handsome sum besides, in token of his regard and good wishes : it was a simple precaution, by the way, for Monsieur de Camors apprehended no further trouble

from that venomous personage, as he was deprived of the only weapons he possessed against him and also of the only object that could have induced him to use them ; for he understood that Monsieur Vautrot had done him the honor to covet his wife, and he considered him a little less base on that account, giving him credit for being a gentleman to that extent after all.



## V

It required a supreme effort of courage on the part of Monsieur de Camors that morning to perform his duty as a gentleman by going himself to meet Madame de Tècle at the railway station ; but courage had long been his only virtue, and that virtue, at all events, he was never to lose. He received his mother-in-law in her mourning garb with the utmost courtesy. She was surprised not to see her daughter with him. He told her that she had not been feeling very well since the preceding day. Despite his cautious language and his smile, Madame de Tècle could not avoid a feeling of poignant alarm. He did not undertake to do more than partially reassure her. Beneath the studied reserve of his replies she felt certain that disaster lay hidden ; after pressing him with questions at first, she kept silence during the remainder of the drive.

The young countess, in order to spare her mother the first painful impression, had left her bed and had even put a little rouge on her pale cheeks, poor child. Monsieur de Camors himself opened the door of her daughter's

room for Madame de Tècle, and withdrew.—The young woman sat erect with difficulty upon her chair, and her mother took her in her arms. At first there was simply an exchange of close embraces and silent caresses ; then the mother sat down beside her daughter, put her head against her breast, and said, in a sorrowful tone, gazing earnestly into her eyes :

“What is it?”

“Oh ! nothing—nothing desperate ; only you must love your little Mary more dearly than ever, won’t you?”

“Yes ; but what is the matter?”

“You mustn’t make yourself sick,—and you mustn’t make me sick either—You know why, don’t you?”

“Yes ; but I implore you, my darling child, tell me !”

“Well, I will tell you everything ; but, in pity’s name, mother, be brave, as I am !”

She buried her face more closely in her mother’s breast, and began in a low voice, without looking at her, to tell of the terrible disclosure that had been made to her, which her husband’s admission had confirmed.

Madame de Tècle did not once interrupt her during that cruel tale ; she simply kissed her hair from time to time. The young countess, who dared not raise her eyes to her mother’s face, as if she were ashamed of another’s crime, persuaded herself that she had exaggerated the gravity of her misfortune in her own mind, as her mother received her story so calmly ; but Madame de Tècle’s calmness at

that awful moment was the calmness of the martyrs ; for all that Christian ever suffered under the claws of the tiger or the torturer's flesh-hook, that mother suffered then under the hand of her beloved daughter. Her lovely, pale face, her great eyes turned upward, like those in the pictures of the chaste victims kneeling in the Roman circus, seemed to be asking God if there really was consolation for such torture !

When she had heard the whole story, she summoned courage to smile at her daughter, who looked up at her at last with an expression of timid anxiety, and she said, embracing her more closely :

“ Well, my darling, it is very sad, it is true ; but you are right, there is nothing desperate.”

“ Do you think so ? ”

“ Surely—there is an unfathomable mystery about it ; but be sure that the harm done is not so great as it seems.”

“ But, my dear mother, when he admits it ! ”

“ I prefer to have him admit it, do you know. It proves that there is still some pride, something to build hope upon in his heart ; and then, I saw that he was very much depressed—he is suffering as well as ourselves. We must think about the future you see, dearie.”

They held each other's hands and smiled at each other, forcing back the tears in which their eyes were swimming. After a few moments, Madame de Tècle said :

"I should be very glad to rest for half an hour, my child ; and my toilet needs to be put in order too."

"I will take you to your room. Oh ! I can walk. I feel much better."

She took her mother's arm and went with her as far as the door of the room set apart for her. She left her at the threshold.

"Be prudent," said Madame de Tècle, turning and smiling again.

"And you too!" murmured the younger woman in a hardly audible voice.

As soon as the door was closed, Madame de Tècle raised her clasped hands to Heaven ; then, falling on her knees beside the bed, she buried her head in it and fell to sobbing frantically.

Monsieur de Camors's library adjoined her room. He had taken refuge there. At first he strode up and down the great room, expecting from moment to moment to see Madame de Tècle come in. The moments passed ; he sat down and tried to read ; but his thoughts escaped him, his ear listened eagerly, despite his efforts, to the slightest sound. If a footstep seemed to be approaching, he rose abruptly and hastily composed his features. When the door of the adjoining room was opened, his anguish redoubled ; he distinguished the whispering of two voices, and, a moment later, the dull thud of Madame de Tècle falling on the floor and her desperate sobbing. Monsieur de Camors violently threw aside the book he

was struggling to read, rested his elbow on the desk at which he was sitting and sat for a long while, his pale face pressed against his clenched fingers.—When the sobbing grew less violent and gradually ceased, he breathed again.

About noon he received this note :

“If you will allow me to take my daughter to the country for a few days, I shall be grateful to you.

“ÉLISE DE TÈCLE.”

He at once wrote this line in reply :

“You can do nothing that I do not approve, to-day and always.

“CAMORS.”

Madame de Tècle, after consulting her daughter's inclination and measuring her strength, had determined, if possible, to remove her without delay from the influence of the place where she had suffered so much, from her husband's presence, and the painful embarrassment of their situation with respect to each other. She herself felt the necessity of mature reflection in solitude, in order to make up her mind what course to take under circumstances which were unprecedented. Nor did she feel that she had the courage to meet Monsieur de Camors, if she must see him again, until some little time had elapsed.

Not without anxiety did she await Camors's reply to

her request. In the terrible confusion of her ideas, she believed him to be capable of everything, and she feared everything from him. The count's note reassured her; she made haste to read it to her daughter, and both of them, like two creatures clinging to the slenderest twig, were overjoyed to observe the sort of respectful self-abnegation with which he left their fate in their own hands.

He passed the day at the session of the Corps Législatif, and when he returned home they had gone.

Madame de Camors awoke the next morning in the chamber that had been hers in her girlhood; the birds of spring were singing under her windows in the old ancestral garden. She recognized the friendly voices of her childhood and was moved; but a few hours' sleep had restored her natural courage. She put away the thoughts that made her weak, left her bed and went to surprise her mother when she awoke. Soon after, they were both walking on the linden terrace: it was the latter part of April, the fragrant young grass was springing up in the sunshine, the bees were already buzzing in swarms among the half-open roses, the lilacs' purple pyramids, and the hanging clusters of the laburnum. After they had walked back and forth several times in silence, amid the delightful freshness, the young countess, seeing that her mother was absorbed in thought, took her hand.

"Mother," she said, "don't be sad; here we are, just

as we used to be ; together in our little corner. We shall be happy here ! ”

Her mother looked at her, took her face in her hands, and said, kissing her forehead in a sort of frenzy :

“ You are an angel ! ”

It must be confessed that their uncle Des Rameures, despite their devoted affection for him, troubled them sorely. He had never liked Camors, he had accepted him as a nephew, as he had accepted him as a deputy, with more resignation than enthusiasm. His dislike was only too fully justified by the result ; but it was necessary to conceal that result from him. He was an excellent man, but outspoken and rough. Camors's conduct, if he had so much as suspected it, would certainly have driven him to some irreparable outbreak. So Madame de Tècle and her daughter mutually agreed to maintain an impenetrable reserve before him. They took the like precaution whenever they were in the presence of any stranger. Such painful constraint would have become unbearable at last, had not the state of the young countess's health, which assumed from day to day a less doubtful character, furnished sufficient excuse for their anxious preoccupation and the retired life they led.

Madame de Tècle meanwhile, blaming herself for her daughter's misfortune as her work, and reproaching herself therefor with inconceivable bitterness, did not cease to seek, amid the ruins of the past and the present, some compensation, some refuge for the future. The first idea



that came to her mind had been to effect an absolute separation between the countess and her husband at any price. Under the first shock of the horror that Camors's shameful duplicity had caused her to feel, she had been unable to look forward without dismay to the thought of placing her daughter beside such a man again ; but such a separation, even assuming that it could be accomplished, either with the consent of Monsieur de Camors, or by authority of law, would put the public in possession of the scandalous secret and might entail lamentable results. Even if it had not that effect, it would at all events dig an everlasting chasm between Madame de Camors and her husband. That was what Madame de Tècle did not wish to do ; for, by force of thinking deeply upon the subject, she had come at last to look upon Camors's character, not perhaps in a more favorable but in a juster light. Madame de Tècle, although unfamiliar with evil in any form, knew the world and life, and her keen intelligence divined even more than she knew. Thus she almost understood what species of moral monstrosity Camors was, and, having that understanding of him, she still had some hopes of him. Lastly, the countess's condition promised her in the near future a consolation which she must not risk taking from her, and God might grant that that pledge of such a wretched union should some day mend its broken bonds.

Madame de Tècle communicated her reflections, her fears and her hopes to her daughter, and added :

"My poor child, I have almost lost the right to give you advice ; I simply say to you : 'This is what I would do in your place.'"

"Very well, mother, I will do it."

"Think well before you decide, for there will be many bitter things in the position you are about to accept ; but alas ! we have only a choice between bitter things."

As a result of this conversation, about a week after their arrival in the country, Madame de Tècle wrote Monsieur de Camors the following letter, with her daughter's approval :

"You seemed to me to imply that you would restore your wife her liberty, if she should wish to resume it. She does not, she cannot wish it. She owes her life to the child who will bear your name. It will not depend upon her alone to keep that name without stain. She begs you, therefore, to retain a place for her in your house. Do not fear any annoyance from her or any reproaches. She and I know how to suffer in silence. I do entreat you, however, to be kind to her. Spare her. Be good enough to allow her a few days more of tranquillity here and then send for her, or come."

This letter touched Camors. Impassive as he may have been, we can readily imagine that he did not enjoy perfect peace of mind after his wife's departure. Uncertainty is the worst of ills, because it imagines them all.

Having been absolutely without news for a week, there was no possible catastrophe that he did not feel fluttering about his head. He had had the courage and the pride to conceal from Madame de Campvallou the crisis that had occurred in his household and to leave her at peace when he himself had lost the power to sleep. It was by such energetic efforts of manly pride that the extraordinary man succeeded in retaining some sort of self-esteem.

Thus Madame de Tècle's note delivered him from a heavy burden. He answered it briefly as follows :

"I accept your decision with gratitude and respect. Your daughter's resolution is a generous one. I have enough generosity left myself to appreciate it. I am, however, whether you wish it or not, her friend and yours.

"CAMORS."

It was a week later when Monsieur de Camors, having taken the precaution to announce his coming by a line, arrived one evening at Madame de Tècle's house. His young wife kept her room. They had taken pains to send away all witnesses ; but the interview was less painful and less embarrassing than they might well have feared. Madame de Tècle and her daughter had discovered in the count's reply a sort of nobility which gave them a gleam of confidence. They were proud, above everything, and more averse to loud scenes than women usually are. They received him, therefore, coldly but calmly. As for him, his features and his language manifested a grave

and sad gentleness which lacked neither dignity nor charm. The conversation, after dwelling for some time on the countess's health, wandered to the news of the day, to local matters of interest, and gradually assumed an unreserved, every-day tone. Monsieur de Camors, alleging fatigue as a pretext, withdrew as he had come, bowing to them both and making no attempt to take their hands.

Thus were inaugurated between Madame de Camors and her husband the new and unusual relations which were to be thenceforth the only bond between their lives.

It was the easier to deceive the world, because Monsieur de Camors was not the man for demonstrations in public, and his courteous but reserved demeanor toward his wife marked no perceptible departure from his previous habit in that regard.

He remained at Reuilly two days. Madame de Tèle during those two days vainly awaited a palliating explanation, which she did not wish to ask for, but which she hoped would be forthcoming. What was the terrible chain of circumstances that had overpowered his free-will to the point of making him forget the most sacred sentiments? Her thoughts, when she strove to fathom that mystery, did not fail to come near the truth. Monsieur de Camors must have been guilty of the unworthy deed under the threat of some terrible danger, in order to save the honor, the fortune, perhaps the life of Madame de Campvallon. That was a weak excuse in that

mother's eyes ; but it was an excuse. Perhaps, too, when he married her daughter, he had had it in his heart to break off the fatal liaison, which had afterward seized upon him again, almost in spite of himself, as is not infrequently the case. Upon all those perplexing points she was, after Monsieur de Camors's departure, as before his arrival, reduced to her own conjectures, whose most comforting possibilities she shared with her daughter.

It had been agreed that Madame de Camors should remain in the country until she was fully restored to health. But her husband had expressed a desire that she should reside on his estate of Reuilly, the manor-house of which had been restored with much taste. Madame de Tècle felt the propriety of that arrangement ; she herself turned her back upon the Comte de Tècle's ancient abode, to be with her daughter in the modest château which had belonged to Monsieur de Camors's maternal ancestors, and whose stately avenue, whose granite balustrades, whose labyrinth of paths lined with hornbeam, and whose dark pond shaded by centenary firs we have described in another part of this narrative.

There, they were both surrounded by reminders of their sweetest, happiest days ; for the little château, so long untenanted, the neglected woods that surrounded it, the melancholy pond, the solitary nymph, all had been their special domain, the favorite framework of their common reveries, the legend of their infancy, the poetry of their girlhood. It is a sad, sad experience, doubtless, to

revisit with eyes filled with tears, with wounded heart and head bowed beneath the tempests of life, the familiar spots where we have known happiness and peace ; but all those dear confidants of your bygone joys, of your blasted hopes, of your unfulfilled dreams, although they are sorrowful witnesses, are also friends. You love them and they seem to love you. So it was that those two poor women, as they wandered among those woods and streams, in that solitude, with their incurable wounds, fancied that they heard voices pitying them and breathing forth a sympathy that soothed their pain.

The most cruel trial which Madame de Camors was doomed to undergo in the existence she had had the courage and wisdom to accept, was assuredly the necessity of meeting the Marquise de Campvallon and treating her in such a way as to deceive the general and the world at large. She was resigned to it, but she desired to postpone as long as possible the painful emotion of the meeting. Her health furnished her with a plausible excuse for not going to Campvallon during that summer, and also for remaining in her room on the day that the marchioness came to call at Reuilly, accompanied by the general. She was received by Madame de Tècle, who succeeded in welcoming her with her usual grace. Madame de Campvallon, who had then been informed by Monsieur de Camors of what had taken place, was no more embarrassed than her hostess,—for the best women as well as the worst excel in such comedies—and

the visit passed off without affording the general any ground for the shadow of a suspicion.

The summer passed. Monsieur de Camors made a considerable number of visits to the country, at each interview giving more definite form to his new relations with his wife. He stayed at Reuilly, as he was accustomed to do, during the month of August, and he himself alleged his wife's health as an excuse for not multiplying his visits to Campvallon that year.

On his return to Paris he resumed his usual habits and his careless, egotistical mode of life, for he had gradually recovered from the shock he had received ; he was beginning to forget his own suffering, much more his wife's, and even to congratulate himself secretly on the turn chance had given to his position. He retained all its advantages, and no longer had any of its disadvantages. His wife knew what was going on, so that he would no longer be deceiving her ; that was in reality a relief to him. She was about to become a mother ; she would have a plaything, a consolation ; he intended, moreover, to redouble his attentions and his consideration for her. She would be happy, or almost that,—as happy after all as three-fourths of the wives in the world. So everything was for the best. He removed the drag from his chariot, and started anew in his brilliant career, proud of his queenly mistress, dreaming of attaining a kingly fortune in addition, and seeing in the distance, as a fitting crown to his life, the triumph of ambition and of power.



Alleging divers engagements of doubtful authenticity, he went but once to Reuilly in the course of the autumn ; but he wrote quite frequently and Madame de Tècle sent him brief bulletins concerning his wife's health.

One morning, toward the end of November, he received a despatch giving him to understand in telegraphic style that he must repair at once to Reuilly, if he wished to be present at the birth of his child. The instant that anything appeared to him in the light of a duty enjoined by propriety or courtesy, Monsieur de Camors did not hesitate. Finding that he had not a moment to spare if he wished to take the morning train, he at once jumped into a cab and hurried to the station. His servant was ordered to follow him the next day.

The station nearest to Reuilly was several leagues distant. In the confusion caused by the expected event, no arrangements had been made to meet him on his arrival, and he had to resign himself to make the journey in one of the lumbering vehicles of the province. The wretched condition of the roads was an additional vexation, and it was three o'clock in the morning when the count, out of temper and benumbed with cold, alighted from the carriage at the gate of his avenue.

He walked hurriedly toward the house, beneath the still leafy and profoundly dark arch of the silent elms. He was in the centre of the avenue when a shrill cry pierced the air : his heart leaped in his breast ; he stopped abruptly and listened. The cry rang out again,

more prolonged, in the darkness. One would have said that it was the desperate call for help of a human creature under a murderer's knife. The heart-rending sounds died away little by little ; he went on more hastily, no longer hearing the dull, precipitate beating of his arteries. —Just as he distinguished the lights in the château, another cry of anguish arose, even more poignant, more alarming than before, and again Monsieur de Camors stopped.—Although the natural explanation of those agonizing cries suggested itself at once to his mind, he was disturbed by them. It not rarely happens that men accustomed as he was to a purely artificial life feel a strange sensation of surprise when some one of nature's simplest laws suddenly confronts them with the imperious and irresistible force of a divine command.

Monsieur de Camors reached the house at last, obtained some information from the servants and sent word to Madame de Tècle of his arrival. Madame de Tècle came down at once from her daughter's room.

"Are you anxious about her?" asked Camors eagerly, when he saw her drawn features and her eyes wet with tears.

"Anxious, no," she said, "but she is suffering terribly and it is very long."

"May I see her?"

There was a pause. Madame de Tècle's brow contracted and she lowered her eyes ; then she looked up at him and said :

"If you insist upon it."

"I insist upon nothing. If you think that my presence will have a bad effect upon her—"

Monsieur de Camors's voice was not so steady as usual.

"I am afraid it will excite her very much," replied Madame de Tècle. "If you will have confidence in me, I shall be greatly obliged to you."

"But," said Camors, "perhaps she would be glad to know that I have come, that I am here, that I do not abandon her."

"I will tell her."

"Very well."

He inclined his head slightly to Madame de Tècle and at once turned away. He entered the garden behind the house and walked about at random from path to path.

It is common knowledge that there is as a general rule nothing attractive or noble in the part men have to play under such circumstances as those in which Monsieur de Camors found himself at that moment; but the usual unpleasant features of the experiences were aggravated in his case by some particularly painful reflections. Not only was his presence useless, it was dreaded; not only was he not a staff to lean upon, he was an additional peril and source of suffering. There was a bitterness in the thought which even he felt. His natural generosity and his perverted kindness of heart shuddered as he listened to the wild shrieks and wails of pain that fell upon his ear almost without intermission. In fact, he

passed some very wretched hours on the damp soil of that garden, in the cold darkness and the gloomy dawn that followed it.

Madame de Tècle came several times to bring him news. About eight o'clock he saw her walking toward him with a grave and tranquil expression.

"Monsieur," she said, "you have a son."

"I thank you. How is she?"

"Very well. I will call you to come and see her in a moment."

Half an hour later she appeared again in the doorway of the vestibule and called him.

"Monsieur de Camors!"

When he joined her she added, her lips trembling with emotion:

"For some time past she has been disturbed on one subject. She is afraid that you have spared her thus far, only to take her child from her. If you ever should have such a thought,—do not do it now, monsieur, will you?"

"You are very hard, madame!" he replied in a hollow voice.

She sighed.

"Come," she said.

She led the way upstairs. She opened the door of the room and allowed him to enter alone.

His first glance met his young wife's eyes fastened upon his face. She was in a half-sitting posture, sup-

ported by pillows, and whiter than the curtains whose soft shadow enveloped her ; her sleeping child, already covered, like his mother, with white lace and pink ribbons, was tightly pressed to her breast. From the depths of her nest she fixed upon her husband her great eyes, gleaming with a sort of wild brilliancy, in which an expression of triumph was mingled with one of profound terror.

He stopped a few steps from the bed, and said, bestowing his sweetest smile upon her :

“I have been very sorry for you, Marie.”

“Thanks,” she replied in a voice as feeble as a breath.

She continued to gaze at him with the same air of terrified entreaty.

“Are you a little happy now?” he asked.

The young woman’s flashing eye turned swiftly upon her child’s calm face, then she looked up at Camors again.

“You are not going to take him from me?”

“Never !” he said.

As he uttered the word his eyes suddenly grew dim, and he was astonished to feel tears stealing down his cheeks. He was seized with a strange impulse : he stooped, took up a fold of the sheet, put his lips to it, and, rising again at once, left the room.

In his terrible struggle against nature and truth this man, too often victorious, had for once been conquered.

—But it would be childish to imagine that a character of that temper, hardened as his was, could have been transformed or even sensibly modified by a little ephemeral emotion or a shock or two to his nerves. Monsieur de Camors soon recovered from his weakness, even if he did not repent of it.

He passed a week at Reuilly, noticing in Madame de Tècle's manner and in their daily relations a little less reserve than before. On his return to Paris he ordered, with considerable forethought, some changes in the interior arrangement of his house, in order to provide larger and more comfortable quarters for the young countess and her son, who were to join him a few weeks later.

## VI

When Madame de Camors returned to Paris and to her husband's house, she was assailed by heart-breaking memories of the past and depressing anxieties concerning the future ; but she brought with her a potent source of consolation, although in a very frail form. Grief-stricken as she was, and constantly threatened by renewed emotion, when her child was born, she had been obliged to abandon all thought of nursing him herself ; but she never left him, for she was jealous of his nurse and she was determined that he at least should love her. She loved him with an immeasurable passion ; she loved him because he was her son and her blood, and the price of her suffering ; she loved him because in him lay thenceforth her only hope of happiness on earth ; she loved him because he was in her eyes as beautiful as the day,—and it is true that he was, for he resembled his father, and she loved him because of that resemblance too.

She tried therefore to concentrate all her heart and all her thoughts on the dear creature, and at first she thought



that she had succeeded. She was herself surprised at her calmness when she met Madame de Campvallon, for her vivid imagination had exhausted in advance all the sorrows that her new existence might have in store for her ; but when she had thrown off the species of torpor into which so many successive sorrows had plunged her, when her maternal sensations were somewhat diminished in intensity by habit, the wife's heart came to life again in the mother's heart, and she could not prevent a passionate renewal of feeling toward her courteous and awe-inspiring husband.

Madame de Tècle passed two months with her daughter in Paris, then returned to the country. Madame de Camors wrote her, early in the following spring, a letter which will give an accurate idea of the young woman's feelings at that time and of the turn her family life had taken. After many details concerning her son Robert's health and beauty, she added :

“His father is still the same to me as when you were here. He spares me all that I can be spared ; but the fatality that he obeys is still at work in the same form. And yet I do not despair of the future, my darling mother. Since I saw that tear in his eye, hope has returned to my poor heart. Be sure, my adored mother, that he will love me some day, even if it be only through his son, whom he is beginning to love by slow degrees without being conscious of it. At first, you remember,

the child was nothing to him, any more than I was; when he found him in my lap he would gravely kiss him with the ends of his lips. 'Good-morning, monsieur!' he would say, then make his escape. Just a month ago—I made a note of the date—it was: 'Good-morning, my son!—what a pretty fellow you are!' You see the progress? And what do you suppose happened yesterday? I went into Robert's room without making any noise, the door being open; what did I see, mother? Monsieur de Camors, with his head under the cradle hood, laughing at the little fellow who was laughing back at him! He blushed, I promise you; he tried to apologize.

"'The door was open,' he said, 'so I came in.'

"'There's no harm in that,' I replied.

"He acts very strangely sometimes, does Monsieur de Camors: he goes beyond the stipulated and necessary limits with me. He is not polite simply; he puts himself out. Alas! in other times such favors would have fallen upon my heart like the dew from Heaven! Now, they embarrass me a little.—Last night, for example—another epoch-marking date!—I was sitting at my piano after dinner, as usual; he was reading a newspaper by the fireplace. The hour at which he usually goes out had passed. I was tremendously surprised. I glanced furtively at him between two chords; he was not reading, he was not asleep; he was musing.

"'Is there anything new in the paper?'

“ ‘No, nothing at all.’

“ ‘Two or three chords more, and then I went to my son. I put him to bed and to sleep, devoured him with kisses and returned.—Monsieur de Camors was still there.—And then, in rapid succession :

“ ‘Have you heard from your mother? What does she say? Have you seen Madame Jaubert? Have you read this review?’

“ ‘In short, my gentleman is anxious to talk.

“ ‘Formerly I would have given my heart’s blood for such an evening, and he gives it to me when I hardly know what to do with it.

“ ‘However, I remembered my mother’s advice : I would not discourage that hint of better things, so I assumed a festive manner, I lighted four extra candles, I tried to be agreeable without being coquettish, for coquetry in this house would be a scandal, would it not, mother?—We chattered away, he sang two tunes to my accompaniment, I played two others, he sketched a little Russian costume for Robert to wear next year ; then he talked politics to me. That enchanted me. He explained his position in the Chamber to me. The clock struck twelve. I became remarkably silent. He rose.

“ ‘May I shake hands with you as a friend?’

“ ‘*Mon Dieu*, yes !’

“ ‘Good-night, Marie.’

“ ‘Good-night.’

“Yes, I can read your thoughts, mother: there is danger in such scenes; but you pointed it out to me, indeed, I believe I should have detected it unaided. So have no fear. I shall be happy over his good impulses, I shall do my best to encourage them, but I shall not be in a hurry to see in them a genuine return to the right and to me. I see instances of so-called reconciliations in society here that disgust me. In all my misery I remain pure and proud; but I should despise myself utterly if I should ever run the risk of being an object of Monsieur de Camors’s capricious fancy. A man who has fallen so low does not rise in one day. If he ever really comes back to me, he must produce very convincing proofs of his change of heart. I have not ceased to love him and perhaps he suspects it; but he will learn that although that lamentable love may break my heart, it cannot degrade it, and I need not tell my mother that I shall have strength to live and die bravely in my widow’s weeds.

“Other symptoms have impressed me. He is more attentive to me when she is present. Perhaps it is so arranged between them, but I doubt it. The other evening we were at the general’s. She was waltzing, and Monsiètr de Camors had conferred upon your daughter the rare favor of taking a seat beside her. As she passed she darted a glance, a lightning-flash at us.—I felt the flame. Can blue eyes be fierce? It would seem so. Assuredly my heart is not kindly disposed to her, she is

my bitter enemy ; but if she should ever suffer what she has caused me to suffer,—I think, yes I am sure that I should pity her.

“ I embrace you, mother. I embrace our dear lindens. I eat their little new leaves as in the old days. Scold me as you used to do, and above all things, love as of old, your

“ MARY.”

The wise young wife, matured by misfortune, observed everything, saw everything and exaggerated nothing. In the letter we have quoted she touched upon the most delicate points of Monsieur de Camors's position, and upon his inmost feelings too, with accurate insight.

Monsieur de Camors was by no means converted, or likely to be ; but it would be ignoring undeniable truth to attribute to his heart, or any other man's, supernatural imperviousness to emotion. If the implacable, depressing theories which Monsieur de Camors had made the law of his existence could triumph absolutely, they would be true. The tests that he had undergone had not transformed him but they had shaken him. He no longer trod his chosen path with the same firm tread. He departed from his programme. He had felt pity for one of his victims, and as one error always leads to others, after having pitied his wife, he almost loved his child. Those two weaknesses had crept into that petrified heart as into the cracks of a marble tablet,

and had taken root there : but the roots were imperceptible. The child occupied his attention for a few moments only in each day ; but he thought about him and sometimes returned home a little earlier than usual, secretly attracted by the smile on that rosy face. The mother was something more to him. Her suffering, her youthful heroism, had touched him. She had become an actual person in his eyes. He discovered meritorious qualities in her. He found that she was well educated for a woman, and extraordinarily so for a Frenchwoman. She understood a mere hint, knew a great deal and divined the rest. She had that combination of grace and solidity which lends an incomparable charm to the conversation of women whose minds are cultivated.

Having been accustomed from childhood to her mental superiority as well as to her pretty face, she carried one as unaffectedly as the other. She devoted herself to household cares as if she had had no other thoughts in her head. There were some details which she did not trust to the servants. She went after them through her salon and her boudoir, with a blue feather-duster in her hand, with which she touched lightly the cabinets, the jardinières, the consoles ; she arranged and rearranged the furniture, placed flowers in a vase, hopping about and singing like a bird in its cage. Her husband sometimes amused himself by watching her as she attended to these petty duties. She reminded him of the princesses in the Opéra ballets, reduced, by some stroke of fate,

to a brief period of housekeeping, and dancing over their tasks.

"How fond you are of order, Marie!" he said to her one day.

"Order," she said gravely, "is the moral beauty of things."

She emphasized the word *things*, and then, fearing that she had been presumptuous, she blushed.

She was a lovable creature, and our readers will understand, we trust, that she possessed some power of attraction, even for her husband. Although he did not for a single moment think of sacrificing to her the passion that held his life in bondage, it is none the less certain that his wife attracted him, as a charming friend that she was, and, perhaps, as a charming forbidden fruit, which she also was.

Two or three years passed and brought no perceptible change in the mutual relations of the various characters of this tale. It was the most brilliant and without doubt the happiest period of Monsieur de Camors's life. His marriage had doubled his fortune; his shrewd speculations added to it every day. He had arranged his household to correspond with his increased resources: in the highest spheres of fashionable society, he unquestionably held the sceptre. His horses, his carriages, his artistic taste, even his dress governed the fashion. His liaison with Madame de Campvallou, although not made public, was generally suspected and



put the finishing touch to his prestige. At the same time his capacity as a politician began to manifest itself and become notorious; he had taken the floor in some recent debates and his *maiden speech* was a triumphant performance.

His prosperity was unbounded. It is true, however, that Monsieur de Camors's enjoyment of it was not without alloy. Two dark spots marred the azure expanse in which he soared, and might contain thunder and lightning.—In the first place, his life constantly hung by a thread. General de Campvallou might be informed any day of the intrigue that dishonored him, either by the treachery of some interested person or by public rumor, which was beginning to be very audible. If such a thing should ever happen, he knew that the general would not spare him, and he was determined not to defend his life against him. That resolution, which he had deliberately formed, served as a final argument to set his conscience at rest. Thus the whole fabric of his destiny was at the mercy of a contingency not unlikely to occur.

The second cause of uneasiness was Madame de Campvallou's jealous hatred of the young rival she had herself chosen. After a season of frank jesting upon that subject, the marchioness had gradually ceased to allude to it at all. Monsieur de Camors, being unable to close his eyes to certain unspoken indications, was sometimes alarmed by that mute jealousy. Fearing to aggravate

the fiercest of all female passions in so inflammable a heart, he was reduced from day to day to expedients which cost his pride dear, and perhaps his heart as well, for his wife, to whom his new line of conduct was inexplicable, suffered keenly because of it, and he saw that she did.

One evening in the month of May, 1860, there was a reception at the Hôtel de Campvallon. The marchioness took that method of bidding farewell to the most intimate group of her set, before going to the country. Although the function was rather a small affair, it was managed with her usual refinement and good taste. A sort of gallery of flowers and greenery led from the salons through the garden to the conservatory. It was a trying evening for Madame de Camors; her husband's negligent treatment of her was so marked, his attentions to the marchioness were so persistent, their mutual understanding to all appearance was so satisfactory, that the young wife's suffering was almost unendurable. She took refuge in the conservatory, and, finding that she was alone there, she began to weep. A moment later, Monsieur de Camors, not seeing her in the salons, became anxious about her; with the swift glance with which a woman sees without looking, she soon saw him enter the conservatory. She pretended to be examining the flowers on the benches, and by an effort of her will she dried her tears. Meanwhile her husband had walked slowly toward her.

"What a magnificent camellia!" she said; "do you know the variety?"

"Very well," he said, "it is the weeping camellia."

He snatched the flower from her hand.

"Marie," he said, "I was never much given to child's play, but this flower I will keep."

She looked at him in utter amazement.

"Because I love it," he added.

The sound of footsteps made them both turn. It was Madame de Campvallon, who was walking through the conservatory on the arm of a foreign diplomatist.

"Excuse me," she said with a smile, "I disturb you! how awkward I am!" And she passed on.

Madame de Camors had suddenly become very red and her husband very pale. The diplomatist alone did not change color, because he did not know what was going on.

The young countess, pleading a headache which the expression of her face made probable, departed almost immediately, saying to her husband that she would send the carriage back.

A few moments later Madame de Campvallon, in obedience to a secret signal from Monsieur de Camors, joined him in the retired boudoir, which reminded them both of the guiltiest moment of their lives. She sat down beside him on the divan with her usual haughty nonchalance.

"What is it?" she said.

"Why do you spy upon me?" said Camors. "That is unworthy of you."

"Ah! an explanation? A melancholy thing, an explanation! This is the first we have had; at all events let it be full and soon over."

She spoke in a restrained but passionate voice, her eyes fixed upon her foot, which she raised and lowered slowly, twisting it about in its satin slipper.

"Be frank," she continued, "you are in love with your wife, are you not?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Unworthy of you, I say again."

"What is the meaning of this tender regard for her?"

"You ordered me to marry, not to kill her, I suppose."

She moved her eyebrows in a strange way which he did not see, for neither was looking at the other. After a pause, she rejoined:

"She has her son, she has her mother; I have no one but you!—Look you, my friend, don't make me jealous, for, when I am in that condition, I have thoughts at which I am frightened myself.—And, as we have got to this point, if you love her, tell me so; you know me, I am not given to petty stratagems. Indeed, I am so afraid of the suffering and humiliation that I foresee, I am so afraid of myself, that I offer you, I give you back your liberty. I prefer that grief, horrible as it will be, for it is at least honest and noble. Believe me, I am laying

no trap for you. Look at me : I do not often weep.”—Her dark blue eyes were swimming in tears.—“Yes, I am sincere, and I beg you, if you do love her, to make the most of this moment, for, if you let it escape, you will never find it again !”

Monsieur de Camors was in no wise prepared for this peremptory summons. The idea of breaking off his liaison with the marchioness had never passed through his mind. It seemed to him perfectly reconcilable with whatever sentiments his wife might arouse in him. It was the most burdensome sin and the perpetual danger of his life ; but it was also the excitement, the pride and the voluptuous pleasure of his life. He shuddered, he was almost frantic at the thought of losing a love which, moreover, he had bought so dearly. He gazed with ardent, glowing eyes at that lovely face as pure and impassioned as that of a militant archangel.

“My life is yours,” he said. “How can you think of breaking bonds like ours? how can you be alarmed or even give a thought to my conduct toward anybody else? I am what honor and humanity command me to be, nothing more, and I love you—do you understand?”

“Is that true?” she said.

“It is true.”

“I believe you.”

She took his hand and gazed at him a moment without speaking, dim-eyed, her bosom heaving ; then she suddenly rose.

"You know that I have visitors, my dear."

She nodded to him with a smile, and left the boudoir.

The scene left a disagreeable impression on Camors's mind, however, and he was thinking of it with vexation the next day, as he was trying a horse on Avenue des Champs-Élysées, when he suddenly found himself face to face with his former secretary, Vautrot. He had not seen that personage since the day when he had deemed it judicious to dismiss himself without warning. The Champs-Élysées being deserted at that hour, Vautrot could not avoid the meeting with Camors, as he had done more than once perhaps. When he saw that he was recognized, he stopped and bowed, an anxious smile upon his lips. His threadbare black coat and his doubtful linen disclosed unconfessed but profound destitution. Monsieur de Camors did not notice that detail, which would probably have aroused his innate generosity and stifled the indignation which suddenly seized upon him. He abruptly drew rein.

"Ah ! is it you, Monsieur Vautrot ?" he said. "So you are no longer in England? What are you doing now?"

"I am looking for a situation, monsieur le comte," replied Vautrot humbly, knowing his former master too well not to read the signs of a storm in the curl of his moustache.

"Ah ! why do you not take up the locksmith's trade again?" retorted Camors. "You were very clever at it. The most complicated locks had no secrets for you."

"I don't know what you mean," muttered Vautrot.

"Scoundrel !"

As he hurled that word at him in a tone of indescribable contempt, Monsieur de Camors lightly touched Vautrot's shoulder with the lash of his hunting-crop ; after which he trotted tranquilly away.

Monsieur Vautrot was at that time, as he had said, in search of a situation, which he could readily have found, if he had chosen to be content with one that was suited to his acquirements ; but he was, it will be remembered, one of those whose vanity is out of all proportion to their merits, and especially one of those who are more thirsty for the good things of life than for work. He had fallen at this time into extreme destitution which did not need to be much embittered to drive him to wrong-doing, if not to crime. We have had in our days more than one instance of the excesses into which ambitious, covetous and feeble minds of this description may be driven. Monsieur Vautrot, for lack of something better, had resumed, some time before, the hypocritical rôle in which he had formerly achieved success ; only the night before he had reappeared in Madame de la Roche-Jugan's salon, and had there made the *amende honorable* for his philosophic aberrations ; for he was like the Saxons of Charlemagne's time, who asked to be baptized whenever they wanted a new tunic. Madame de la Roche-Jugan had extended a warm welcome to the unfortunate prodigal son ; but her manner grew perceptibly colder when she



found him more reticent than she would have liked upon a certain subject upon which she was very anxious to know more than she did. She was at that time more deeply interested than ever in the relations she had long suspected to exist between Monsieur de Camors and Madame de Campvallon. Those relations could not fail to be fatal to the hopes she had based upon the prospect of the marchioness's widowhood and the general's inheritance. Camors's marriage had thrown her off the scent for a moment ; but she was one of those pious women who always suspect evil, and her suspicions had soon been reawakened. She had tried to obtain from Vautrot, who had long been in her nephew's confidence, some light concerning the mystery, and as Vautrot had sufficient sense of shame to withhold it, she had closed her doors to him.

After his meeting with Monsieur de Camors, Vautrot repaired at once to Rue Saint-Dominique, and an hour later Madame de la Roche-Jugan had the satisfaction of knowing all that he himself knew of Camors's liaison with the marchioness. Now, it will be remembered that he knew everything. His disclosures, however much Madame de la Roche-Jugan may have expected them, fairly stunned her, for it seemed certain that her matrimonial projects were overthrown forever. To the feeling of bitterness caused by that disappointment was soon added in that base heart a frantic longing for revenge. It is true that she had been ill-rewarded for her former anon-

ymous effort to open the unfortunate general's eyes ; for from that moment the general, the marchioness and Camors himself, without breaking off their ordinary intercourse with her, had allowed her to feel the sharp sting of contempt, which had festered in her heart.

It would not do to expose herself to a second discomfiture of the same sort : most assuredly she must, in the name of good morals, bring confusion upon those blind and guilty creatures, but this time she must be armed with such proofs that the blow would be irresistible. By dint of dwelling upon it, Madame de la Roche-Jugan had convinced herself that the new turn of events might prove to be favorable to the plan that had become the fixed idea of her life. Madame de Campvallon ruined, Monsieur de Camors removed from the scene, the general would be left alone in the world, and it was natural to suppose that he would turn then to his young kinsman Sigismond, if for no other purpose than to acknowledge the clear-sighted and outraged friendship of Madame de la Roche-Jugan. To be sure the general had, by his marriage-contract, bequeathed all his property to his wife ; but Madame de la Roche-Jugan, who had consulted counsel on the subject, was aware that he was at liberty, as long as he lived, to dispose of his fortune, to deprive his unworthy spouse thereof, and to bestow it on Sigismond.

Madame de la Roche-Jugan was not deterred by the chance, probable though it was, of a personal conflict

between the general and Camors : the contemptuous intrepidity of women in the matter of duels is well known. She set at work, therefore, without scruple, to enlist Vautrot in the praiseworthy plot she was weaving : she bound him by some immediate benefactions and by promises ; she led him to hope for a handsome remuneration from the general. Vautrot, who still felt Camors's crop on his shoulder, and who would have killed him with his own hand if he had dared, hardly needed the additional incitement of money to take part in his patroness's scheme of vengeance and to become her tool. He resolved, however, as he had the opportunity, to place himself once for all out of the reach of poverty, by trading shrewdly on the secret he possessed and upon the general's vast fortune.

That secret he had already betrayed to Madame de Camors under the impulsion of another sentiment ; but at that time, he had had in his hands proofs which were now lacking. He was compelled therefore to procure new and infallible weapons ; but if the intrigue in question was still in existence, he did not despair of obtaining some certain evidence of it, by the assistance of his general knowledge of the Comte de Camors's former habits. That was the task to which he devoted himself night and day thenceforth, with the malevolent zeal of hatred and covetousness.

The absolute confidence which Monsieur de Campvallou had had in his wife and Camors since the count's

marriage to Mademoiselle de Tècle, would undoubtedly have made it possible for the lovers to suppress the complications of mystery and danger in their relations; but the ardent, poetic, theatrical quality of the marchioness's imagination would not suffer it. Love was not enough for her: she must have the danger, the stage-setting, the heightening of enjoyment by terror. Once or twice, in the early days, she had been foolhardy enough to leave her house during the night and return before dawn; but she had been obliged to abandon such audacious exploits as too hazardous. Her nocturnal interviews with Camors were infrequent and they always took place in her house. This was the arrangement.—There was a vacant lot, used at intervals as a wood-yard, adjoining the gardens of the Hôtel de Campvallou; the general had bought a portion of it at one time; he had built a small house upon it, surrounded by a kitchen-garden, and had quartered there, with his usual kindness of heart, an ex-subaltern named Mesnil, who had for a long time acted as his orderly. This Mesnil enjoyed his master's full confidence; he was invested with a sort of general superintendence of Monsieur de Campvallou's woodland estates. He lived at Paris in the winter, but he sometimes passed two or three days in the country when the general desired reliable information concerning some particular controversy. Those periods of absence were selected by Madame de Campvallou and Monsieur de Camors for their perilous

nocturnal assignations. Camors, being notified on the street by some concerted signal, would steal into the enclosure surrounding Mesnil's house, and thence into the gardens of the hôtel. Madame de Campvallou took it upon herself, with a sensation of terror that fascinated her, to hold open one of the long windows on the ground floor. The Parisian custom of relegating the servants to the eaves gave a sort of security to these foolhardy performances, although they were always very dangerous.

Toward the end of May, one of these opportunities, always impatiently awaited by both, presented itself, and Monsieur de Camors entered the ex-orderly's little garden in the middle of the night. Just as he was turning the key in the gate, he thought that he heard a slight noise behind him. He turned, glanced rapidly about the deserted space that surrounded him, and, thinking that he was mistaken, went in. The next moment the shadow of a man appeared at the corner of one of the piles of wood that stood here and there in the wood-yard; the shadow stood for some time, without moving, opposite the windows of the hôtel, then vanished in the darkness.

The following week Monsieur de Camors was at the club one evening, playing whist with the general. He noticed that Monsieur de Campvallou was not attending to his game and detected indications of deep preoccupation upon his features.

"Aren't you feeling well, general?" he said, when the game was at an end.

"Yes, yes," said the general, "only I am annoyed. A vexatious affair—between two of my keepers—in the country. I sent Mesnil to look into it this morning."

The general walked away a few steps, then returned to Camors and took him aside.

"My friend," he said, "I deceived you just now—I have something on my mind, something serious—indeed, I am very unhappy."

"What's the matter, pray?" said Camors, his heart beating violently.

"I will tell you about it—probably to-morrow. At all events, come and see me to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Thanks. I am going now, for I really am not very well."

He pressed his hand more affectionately than usual.

"Good-night, my dear boy," he said; and he turned away abruptly, to conceal the tears that had suddenly filled his eyes.

Monsieur de Camors had been extremely anxious for a few moments; but the general's friendly and emotional leave-taking reassured him fully so far as he himself was concerned, although he was still astonished and even touched by the old man's melting melancholy. Strange-

ly enough, if there were a man in the world to whom he wished well and for whom he would have been ready to sacrifice his life, it was the man upon whom he was inflicting a deadly outrage.

He had good reason to be anxious, however, and he was wrong to be reassured so readily, for the general, in the course of that evening, had been informed of his wife's treachery: at least he had been prepared for it. But he was still in ignorance of the name of her accomplice, those persons who had given him the information fearing to encounter obstinate and immovable incredulity if they had named Camors. It is probable indeed that, after what had taken place formerly, if that name had been mentioned again, the general would have recoiled from the suspicion as from a monstrous impossibility, dishonorable even to the thought.

Monsieur de Camors remained at the club until one o'clock, then went to Rue Vanneau. He made his way into the Hôtel de Campvallon with the usual precautions, and this time we will follow him.

As he crossed the garden he looked up at the general's window and saw only the soft light of a night lamp shining behind the blinds. The marchioness awaited him at the door of her boudoir, which opened on an exterior rotunda a few steps above the ground. He put his lips to the young woman's hands and said a few words touching the general's pre-occupation and melancholy. She answered that he had been much



worried about his health for a few days past. That seemed a natural explanation to Monsieur de Camors, and he followed the marchioness through the vast salons, all silence and darkness. She held a candle in her hand, its dim light imparting a strange pallor to her delicate features. When they ascended the broad, echoing stairway, the rustling of her dress on the stairs was the only sound that betrayed her light step. She paused from time to time, shivering, as if the better to enjoy the dramatic solemnity that surrounded them ; she threw her fair head back a little to look at Camors ; she smiled her inspired smile, placed one hand on her heart as if to say : " I am afraid ! " and went on.

They reached her bedroom, where a lamp was burning, only partly lighting its sombre splendor, its carved wainscoting, its heavy draperies. The fire on the hearth, blazing up at intervals, cast a bright gleam on two or three pictures of the Spanish school, which were the only decorations of that simple but magnificent apartment.

The marchioness, as if exhausted by fear, dropped on a sort of divan near the fireplace ; then with her foot she moved two cushions upon which Monsieur de Camors half prostrated himself at her feet ; she pushed the thick curls back from his forehead with both hands, and said, as she leaned over her lover :

" Do you love me to-day ? "

Her pure breath was still upon Camors's face when a

door opened opposite them: the general entered the room.

The marchioness and Camors sprang to their feet at the same instant and stood side by side, motionless, looking at him.

The general had halted near the door; he started slightly when he saw them and a ghastly pallor overspread his features. His eye rested for a moment on Camors with an expression of stupor, almost of madness; then he raised his arms over his head and his hands struck noisily against each other.

At that awful moment Madame de Campvallou seized Camors's arm and gazed at him with a penetrating, suppliant, tragic expression that terrified him. He pushed her away almost roughly, folded his arms and waited.

The general walked toward him, slowly at first. Suddenly his face flushed purple, his lips partly opened and moved as if to utter some supreme insult, and he came forward rapidly with his hand raised; but the old man had taken only a few steps when he suddenly stopped and threw his arms about as if to seek some support; then he stumbled, fell forward, struck his head against the marble mantelpiece and, falling headlong to the floor, lay there at full length without moving.

Thereupon there was an ominous silence in that room. It was broken by a stifled cry from Monsieur de Camors, At the same moment he darted forward, knelt beside the motionless old man, and felt his wrist for a long while,

then his heart.—He saw that he was dead.—A slender stream of blood was trickling down over his pallid forehead which the marble had bruised ; but it was a trifling wound. It was not that that had killed him. What had killed him was the treachery of the two beings whom he loved and who, as he believed, loved him. His heart had literally been broken by the violence of the surprise, the grief and the horror.

A glance from Camors told Madame de Campvallon that she was a widow. She sank back upon the divan, hid her face in the cushions and sobbed.

Monsieur de Camors was standing, leaning against the mantelpiece, his eyes fixed on vacancy, thinking deeply.

He would have liked in all the sincerity of his soul to awaken the dead man and give him his life. He had sworn to himself to give it to him without defence if he ever should demand it of him in exchange for forgotten benefactions, friendship betrayed, honor outraged—and now he had killed him ! If he had not committed that crime with his own hand, the crime was there in all its ghastly nakedness. He had the spectacle of it before his eyes, he smelt the stench of it, he breathed its blood.

At an anxious glance from the marchioness he forcibly collected his wits and went to her side. They held a consultation in whispers ; he told her hastily what she must do. She must call the servants, say that the general had suddenly been taken ill, and that he had been struck down as he was entering her room. She realized

with terror that she must wait some time before giving the alarm, for she must give Camors an opportunity to make his escape, and until then she would be obliged to endure a horrifying tête-à-tête with death. He took pity upon her and decided to go out through Monsieur de Campvallou's apartments, which had a private exit on the street.—The marchioness immediately rang the bell violently again and again, and Monsieur de Camors did not leave her until hurried footsteps were heard on the stairs.

The general's apartments were connected with his wife's by a short corridor; there was a study, then the bedroom. Monsieur de Camors passed through that bedroom with feelings we will not try to describe and reached the street safely.

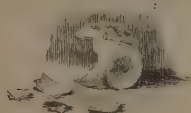
The doctors declared that the general had died from the rupture of a blood-vessel in the heart.—Two days later the funeral took place, and Monsieur de Camors was present. That same evening he left Paris to join his wife, who had been at Reuilly since the preceding week.

## Part Second Chapter VI

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*But the old man had taken only a few steps when he suddenly stopped and threw his arms about as if to seek some support; then he stumbled, fell forward, struck his head against the marble mantelpiece, and, falling headlong to the floor, lay there at full length without moving.*









## VII

One of the pleasantest sensations in the world is that that a man experiences, when he escapes from the fantastic embrace of a nightmare, and, as he wakes with the cold perspiration standing on his forehead, says to himself that he has been dreaming. That was in some sort the feeling experienced by Monsieur de Camors when, upon awaking on the day following his arrival at Reuilly, he saw with his first glance the sun playing among the foliage, and heard his son's rippling laughter under his window. To be sure, he had not been dreaming; but, his mind, exhausted by the terrible strain of his recent emotion, had a moment's truce, and enjoyed almost without alloy the unaccustomed tranquillity that surrounded him. He dressed with something like haste and went down into the garden; his son ran to meet him. Monsieur de Camors kissed him with unwonted tenderness, and, stooping over him, talked to him in a low voice, questioning him about his mother and his childish amusements with a strangely sad and gentle manner, then he let him go and walked slowly back and forth, breathing

the fresh morning air, examining the flowers and the leaves with extraordinary interest. From time to time a deep, spasmodic sigh issued from his over-burdened breast, and he passed his hand over his forehead as if to brush away disturbing thoughts.

He sat upon one of the old-fashioned box-wood seats of curious design, with which the garden was supplied, and called his son to him again; he held him between his knees, questioning him farther in undertones, as he had done before, then drew him to his side and held him for a long time in a close embrace, as if to force the peace and innocence of the child's heart to pass into his own.

Madame de Camors surprised him in that outburst of affection and was stricken dumb with amazement. He rose at once and said, taking her hand:

"How well you are bringing him up! I thank you. He will be worthy of you and your mother."

She was so moved by the gentle, melancholy tone in which he spoke, that she replied, stammering and embarrassed:

"And worthy of you too, I trust!"

"Of me!" said Camors, his lips trembling slightly "Poor child, I hope not!" And he walked hurriedly away.

Madame de Camors and Madame de Tècle had learned of the general's death the previous morning. In the evening, when the count arrived, he did not mention it,

and they were careful to make no allusion to it. They maintained the same reserve on the next day and the following days. Although they were far from suspecting the fatal circumstances that made the memory of the event so burdensome to Monsieur de Camors, they thought it perfectly natural that he should have been shocked by such a sudden catastrophe and that his conscience should be touched by it; but they were astonished that the impression should last from day to day until it seemed to have become a fixed sentiment. They finally made up their minds that some storm had arisen between Madame de Campvallon and himself, perhaps occasioned by the general's death, and had weakened the bond between them. An absence of twenty-four hours, a fortnight after his arrival, naturally aroused their suspicions; but his speedy return, the entirely novel liking for Reuilly, which kept him there during the entire summer, were joyful symptoms to them. He was singularly sad and pensive and displayed a tendency to inaction that was contrary to all his habits. He took long walks alone; sometimes he took his son with him. He made shy attempts to show affection to his wife, and his awkwardness was touching to see.

"Marie," he said to her one day, "you are a fairy, pray wave your wand over Reuilly and transform it into an island in the middle of the ocean."

"You say that because you can swim," she replied, laughing and shaking her head.

But the young wife's heart thrilled with joy.

"You kiss me every minute lately, darling," said Madame de Tècle. "Is it all meant for me?"

"My dearest mother," she replied, kissing her once more, "I assure you that he is really paying court to me. Why? I have no idea; but he is paying court to me—and to you too, mother, do you notice?"

Madame de Tècle did notice it. In his interviews with her, Monsieur de Camors referred with evident purpose to the memories of their common past; one would have said that he wished to link that past to his new life, to forget the rest and pray that it might be forgotten.

Not without fear and trembling did those two lovely women give free rein to their hopes. They remembered that they had to do with a dangerous being. They could hardly conceive of so sudden a metamorphosis, whose moving cause was not clear to them. They feared that it was a mere passing caprice, which would soon, if they were deceived by it, relegate them to their misery, less its former dignity. They were not the only ones, however, who were impressed by the remarkable change. Monsieur des Rameures spoke of it. The peasants of the neighborhood, detecting in the count's language an entirely new tone, a suggestion of newly awakened humanity, said that he had been polite in former years, but now he was kind. Even inanimate things, the woods, the fields, the sky, might have given similar testimony, for

he observed them and studied them with a kindly interest with which he had never before honored them.

The truth is that a deep-rooted perplexity had laid hold upon him and would not let him go. More than once, before this time, his mind, his doctrines, his pride had received rough blows; he had none the less kept on in the same path, rising again after every blow like a wounded but unconquered lion. In the beginning, while trampling upon all the moral beliefs that impose fetters on the common herd, he had set up honor as an inviolable limit; then, under the empire of his passion, he had said to himself that after all, honor was a mere artificial creation, like all the rest, and he had passed it by; but beyond it he had fallen in with crime and had touched it with his hand: he was seized with horror and recoiled.

He turned away with disgust from the principles that had led him to the point he had reached, asking himself, perhaps, what would become of a society which had no others. The simple truths he had disregarded appeared to him in their tranquil splendor; he did not as yet distinguish them clearly, he did not try to give them a name; but he wandered with secret delight in their peaceful shadow, he sought them in his child's pure heart, in his wife's chaste love, in the daily miracles of nature, in the harmonious beauty of the heavens, and, perhaps, in his inmost heart, he already looked to God to make them manifest to him.

In the midst of his yearning impulses toward a regenerated life, he hesitated. Madame de Campvallon was in his path. He still loved her in a vague sort of way; he certainly could not abandon her without something like baseness. His mind was disturbed by ill-defined apprehensions. After he had done so much evil, could he be permitted to do good and to enjoy in peace the happiness of which he dreamed? Would the fetters that bound him to the past, his wrongfully acquired fortune, his fatal mistress, the spectre of that wronged old man, allow it? And, we will add, would Providence permit it? Not that we intend to use lightly the word Providence, as so many people do, and to imply that the threat of some supernatural punishment was hanging over Monsieur de Camors; Providence does not intervene in earthly affairs except in obedience to immutable laws, it is nothing more than the operation of those laws; but it is real enough to be feared.

In the latter part of August, Monsieur de Camors went as usual to the chief town of the department to take part in the deliberations of the Conseil Général. When the session was at an end he went to pay a visit to the Marquise de Campvallon before returning to Reuilly. He had neglected her a little during the summer and had been to Campvallon only at rare intervals, as propriety required. The marchioness wished to keep him to dinner, although she had no guests staying in the house;



she insisted, using her powers of fascination to such good purpose that he yielded at last, reproaching himself for his weakness. He never met her without embarrassment. She recalled some terrible memories, but some terrible transports of passion as well. She had never been so beautiful; her mourning garb enhanced the nobility of her languid, regal grace; it made her brow paler, it heightened the sombre brilliancy of her glance. She had the aspect of a young queen of tragedy or of an allegory of Night.

During the evening there came a time when the reserve that had characterized their relations for some time was laid aside. Monsieur de Camors found himself, as in the old days, at the young marchioness's feet, his eyes gazing into hers, while he covered her dazzlingly white hands with kisses. She was in a strange mood that evening. She gazed at him with yearning affection, pouring at will the most ardent of love-potions into his veins; then she drew away from him and tears gushed from her eyes. Suddenly, with one of the elf-like movements that were familiar to her, she enveloped her lover's head in her hair, and said, speaking low under cover of that perfumed veil:

"We might be so happy!"

"Are we not?" said Camors.

"No, not I, at least; for you are not absolutely mine as I am yours. That seems harder than ever to me now that I am free. If you had remained free yourself—

Oh ! when I think of it !—or if you could become free—it would be paradise ! ”

“ You know that I am not. Why speak of it ? ”

She put her face still nearer to his, and breathed rather than said :

“ Is it impossible, tell me ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ” he demanded.

She did not reply ; but her steadfast, caressing, pitiless glance replied.

“ Speak, I beg you,” murmured Camors.

“ Haven’t you told me—I don’t forget, you see—that we were united by bonds that took precedence of everything, that the world and its laws no longer existed for us, that there was no other good, no other evil, so far as we were concerned, than our happiness or unhappiness ? Well, we are not happy—and if we could be ! Listen—I have thought a great deal about it.”

Her lips touched Camors’s cheeks and the murmur of her last words died away in kisses.

Monsieur de Camors pushed her back and stood in front of her.

“ Charlotte,” he said, vehemently, “ this is to test me, I trust ; but, test or not, never return to the subject—never, do you hear ! ”

She, too, sprang suddenly to her feet.

“ Ah ! how you love her ! ” she cried. “ Yes, you love her ! she is the one you love ! I know it ! I feel it ! and I am no longer anything more than the mis-

erable object of your pity or your caprice !—Very good ; go back to her ! go and watch her ! for I swear to you that she is in danger ! ”

He smiled with his loftiest irony.

“ So that is your plan,” he said ; “ you mean to kill her ? ”

“ If I can ! ” she replied.

And she put forth her superb arm as if to grasp a weapon.

“ What ! with your own hand ? ”

“ The hand—will be found ! ”

“ You are so lovely at this moment,” said Camors, “ that I am dying with longing to fall at your feet. Just confess that you intended to test me, or that you were insane for a moment.”

She smiled a savage smile.

“ Ah ! you are afraid, my friend ! ” she said coldly.

Then, raising her voice again, she said in a hoarse tone :

“ And you are right ! for I am not mad—I was not trying to test you. I am jealous—I am betrayed—and I will have my revenge ! And nothing shall stand in my way, for I no longer care for anything on earth ! Go and look to her.”

“ So be it,” said Camors, “ I will go.”

He at once left the salon and the château. He walked to the railway station and reached Reuilly the same evening. A painful experience awaited him there.

Madame de Camors had gone to Paris during his absence, to make some purchases, and her mother had accompanied her. They remained three days and had returned that morning. He himself arrived very late in the evening. He thought that he detected some embarrassment in their greeting, but in his then state of mind he paid little attention to it.

This is what had happened. Madame de Camors, during her stay in Paris, had gone as usual to pay her respects to her aunt, Madame de la Roche-Jugan. Their relations had always been lukewarm. Neither their characters nor their religious ideas harmonized ; but Madame de Camors was content with not loving her aunt, and Madame de la Roche-Jugan hated her niece. She found a good opportunity to prove it to her and did not let it slip. They had not met since the general's death. That event, for her large share in which Madame de la Roche-Jugan might well have reproached herself, had simply exasperated her. Her wicked act had recoiled upon herself. Monsieur de Campvallon's sudden death had destroyed her last hopes, which she had based upon the old man's anticipated wrath, and its effect upon his marital relations. Since then, she had secretly nourished the fierce hate of a Fury against her nephew and the marchioness. She had learned from Vautrot that Monsieur de Camors was in Madame de Campvallon's room the night the general was stricken. Upon that basis of truth she had not hesitated to construct the

most odious hypotheses, and Vautrot, defeated like herself in his vengeance and his greed, had assisted her. Some unsavory rumors, emanating apparently from that source, had gained some currency in Parisian society. Camors and Madame de Campvallou, suspecting that they had been betrayed a second time by Madame de la Roche-Jugan, had broken with her, and she had found, when she called upon the marchioness, that orders had been given not to admit her—a fact which put the finishing touch to her fury.

These sentiments, in all their violence, were still in full possession of her mind and heart when Madame de Camors called upon her. She took the general's death as the text of their conversation, shed a few tears over her old friend, and then, seizing her niece's hand in an outburst of affection, she exclaimed.

"My poor girl, I weep for you, too, for you will be more unhappy than before—if that is possible."

"I do not understand you, madame," said the younger woman coldly.

"If you don't understand me, so much the better," rejoined Madame de la Roche-Jugan, with a touch of asperity.—"Listen to me, my dear girl," she continued after a pause, "I am performing a conscientious duty, you see; a virtuous creature like you deserved a better fate—and your mother, she is his dupe, too. That man would deceive the good Lord himself! In the name of my family I feel that I must apologize to both of you."

"I repeat, madame, that I do not understand."

"Why, it is impossible, my child! Really, it is impossible that you don't suspect anything in all this time."

"I suspect nothing, madame," said Madame de Camors, "for I know all."

"Indeed!" retorted Madame de la Roche-Jugan, "if that is so, I have nothing to say; but in that case there are people who make very strange bargains with their consciences."

"That is what I said to myself just now, as I listened to you, madame," said the young woman, rising.

"As you please, my dear girl; but I spoke in your interest, and indeed I may well blame myself for not speaking more clearly. I know my nephew better than you do, and the other one too.—Whatever you may say, you don't know all, understand that!—The general died very suddenly—and it's your turn next. So look to yourself, my poor child."

"O madame!" cried the young woman, turning frightfully pale, "I will never see you again while I live!"

She left the house instantly, hurried home and, finding her mother there, repeated to her the horrible words she had heard. Her mother tried to soothe her; but she was sadly disturbed herself. She went at once to Madame de la Roche-Jugan, she begged her to have pity on them, and to withdraw her abominable insinuations or explain them more clearly. She informed her that, if necessary, she would tell Monsieur de Camors, and

that she would not promise that he would not demand satisfaction of his cousin Sigismond. Madame de la Roche-Jugan, being alarmed in her turn, concluded that her safest course was to ruin Monsieur de Camors altogether in Madame de Tècle's mind. So she told her what she knew through Vautrot, taking care not to compromise herself in her narrative. She told her of Monsieur de Camors's presence at the general's during the night of his death. She told her of the current gossip. Mingling falsehood with truth, and at the same time redoubling her suavity, her caresses and her tears, she succeeded in giving Madame de Tècle such an impression of Monsieur de Camors's character, that there were no hypotheses or apprehensions which did not thenceforth seem justifiable to the poor woman. Madame de la Roche-Jugan offered to send Vautrot to her so that she might question him herself. Madame de Tècle affecting an incredulity and a peace of mind which she did not feel, declined, and took her leave.

When she returned to her daughter she tried to deceive her as to the impressions she had received; but she had ill-success; the alteration in her features contradicted her words too plainly.

They left Paris together the following night, mutually concealing the distress and disorder of their minds; but they had been so long accustomed to think and feel and suffer together, that their minds met, without speaking, in the same reflections, the same arguments, the same



terrors. They reviewed Camors's whole life, all his errors, and, in the light of the monstrous crime laid at his door, even his errors assumed a criminal character which they were astonished to find that they had not detected. They discovered a logical sequence in his designs; as against him everything thenceforth was distorted into a crime, even his worthy actions. Thus his conduct during the last few months, his unfamiliar attitude, his revulsion of feeling toward his son, toward his wife, the affectionate assiduity of his attentions to her, were simply the hypocritical preliminaries of a premeditated crime, preparing a mask for itself in advance.

What were they to do? How was it possible for them to live together with the weight of such thoughts pressing upon her? What a present! what a future! They were lost in dismay at the prospect.

The next day Monsieur de Camors could not avoid noticing their strange demeanor in his presence; but he knew that his servant, intending no harm, had spoken of his visit to Madame de Campvallon, and he attributed the coldness and embarrassment of the two women to that fact. He was the less disturbed by it because he was inclined to restore their peace of mind absolutely. As a result of his reflections during the night, he was, in very truth, contemplating a definitive rupture of his liaison with the marchioness. Madame de Campvallon had provided him with an all-sufficient pretext for the rupture, which his scruples in the matter of honor would

have deterred him from provoking. The criminal thought that she had dared to suggest to him was undoubtedly, he thought, only a feint to test him; but the mere expression of it was sufficient to justify his desertion of her. As for the violent, threatening words that jealousy had extorted from her, he took but little account of them, although at times the memory of them disturbed him.

However, he had not felt so light-hearted for years. That evil bond broken, it seemed to him that with his liberty he had resumed a species of youth and virtue. He romped and walked with his son part of the morning.

After dinner, as it was clear and pleasant, although the night was already falling, he suddenly suggested to Madame de Camors that they should take a walk in the woods. He spoke of a spot which had impressed him some time before on a similar night, and which, he added, with a laugh, had pleased his romantic fancy. He could not fail to be surprised at the lack of eagerness displayed by the young woman, at the anxiety depicted on her features and at the swift glance she exchanged with her mother.—In truth, the same thought, and a ghastly thought it was, had passed through the minds of both those wretched women. They had not yet begun to recover from a shock which had almost driven them mad, and Camors's sudden proposition, so entirely contrary to his habit, the hour, the darkness,

the solitary walk, had suddenly stirred to new life in their brains the sinister images that Madame de la Roche-Jugan had planted there. However, Madame de Camors, with an air of determination which the circumstances hardly seemed to demand, at once prepared to go out; then she followed her husband from the house, leaving her son in charge of Madame de Tècle. They had only to cross the garden to reach the forest which adjoined the homestead estate, and stretched away to the primeval woods that had become the property of Monsieur de Camors at the Comte de Tècle's death.

Monsieur de Camors's purpose in seeking that tête-à-tête was to confide to his wife the definite decision he had reached, to place his heart and his life unreservedly at her feet and to enjoy in solitude her first outburst of joy. Surprised at the frigid air of distraction with which the young woman responded to the affectionate gayety of his language, he redoubled his efforts to place their interview upon a private and confidential footing. Stopping at intervals to call her attention to some effect of light and shadow in the vista of a path, he began to question her concerning her recent journey to Paris and the people she had seen. She mentioned Madame Jaubert and some others; then, instinctively lowering her voice, Madame de la Roche-Jugan.

"You might have dispensed with calling on her," said Camors. "I forgot to tell you that I have nothing to do with her."

"Why not?" said she timidly.

"Because she is a vile woman," said Camors. "When you and I are on a little better terms," he added laughing, "I will enlighten you as to her character. I will tell you everything—everything, do you hear?"

The tone in which he uttered the words was so natural and so kind that the countess felt as if her heart were half-relieved of the burden that oppressed it. She responded with less reserve to her husband's gracious advances and to the trivial incidents of the walk. The phantoms in her mind gradually faded away, and she was beginning to say to herself that she had been the plaything of a bad dream and of an attack of genuine madness, when a singular change in her husband's manner reawakened all her terror. Monsieur de Camors had become visibly distraught and engrossed by some grave anxiety. He spoke with effort, half-answered her questions, then stopped suddenly to look about him like a frightened child. Such strange proceedings, so different from his recent attitude, alarmed the young woman the more because they were then in the most deserted and most distant part of the forest.

There was a remarkable correlation between the thoughts that beset them. While Madame de Camors was trembling with fear at her husband's side, he was trembling for her. He thought he had discovered that they were followed. Several times it had seemed to him that he heard in the underbrush branches snapping, leaves

rustling and the sound of muffled footsteps; the sounds ceased when he stopped and began again as soon as he walked on. A moment later he fancied that he saw a man's shadow pass rapidly from one clump of bushes to another behind them. The thought of some poacher occurred to him at first; but he could not reconcile it with the persistency with which the unknown seemed to be following them. He made up his mind at last that they were certainly being watched, and by whom could it be? The repeated threats of Madame de Campvallon against Madame de Camors's life, her passionate and uncontrollable nature, suddenly came to his mind, and, connected with that mysterious pursuit, gave rise to terrifying suspicions. He did not for a moment imagine that the marchioness had undertaken to wreak her vengeance personally; but she had said—he remembered—that the hand would be found. She was rich enough to find that hand, and perhaps it was there on their track.

He did not wish to alarm his wife by calling her attention to the spectre whose presence he thought he could feel beside them; but he could not conceal an agitation, whose every manifestation gave rise to such false and cruel interpretations.

"Let us walk a little faster, Marie," he said, "I am cold."

He quickened his pace and determined to return to the château by the public road, which was lined with

houses. When they approached the edge of the wood, although he still fancied that he heard at intervals the sounds that had alarmed him, he plucked up his courage, recovered his self-possession to some extent, and, being a little ashamed of his panic fear, he stopped and called the countess's attention to the spot that had been the pretext of their expedition. It was a wall of rock overlooking a deep, long-disused clay-pit; the shrubs of fantastic shapes that grew along the crown of the cliff, the hanging creepers, the dark ivies in which the wall was draped, the whiteness of the stone, the vague shimmering of the pond that lay stagnant at the bottom of the pit—all combined to make a spectacle of a certain wild beauty in the luminous darkness.

There was rough ground all about the clay-pit and thickets of bramble-bushes, which compelled those who wished to go from the woods to the road near by to make a long *détour*; but two tree-trunks, fastened together and roughly planed, had been thrown across the narrowest part of the excavation, thus making it possible to go directly to the road, and at the same time, affording to those who took the risk the most extended and picturesque view of the curious spot. Madame de Camors had never seen the rough bridge, which had been recently placed there by her husband's orders.

After gazing at it for some moments, she said abruptly, as the count pointed to the logs :

“Must I go over there?”

"If you're not afraid," said Camors; "at all events, I shall be at hand."

He saw that she hesitated, and her face in the moonlight seemed so singularly pale, that he could not refrain from saying to her:

"I thought you had more courage!"

She hesitated no longer, and put her foot on the dangerous bridge.—Instinctively, as she cautiously felt her way along, she half turned her head to look behind and in that way made her footing less sure. Suddenly she staggered. Monsieur de Camors darted forward to support her, and in the excitement of the moment his hand came down upon her with some violence. The wretched woman uttered a heartrending shriek, made a motion as if to struggle, pushed him back, and, running like a madwoman across the bridge, dashed into the woods. Monsieur de Camors, dumfounded, dismayed, not knowing what had happened, hurried after her;—he found her a few steps from the bridge, leaning against the first tree she had found, facing him, terrified but threatening.

"Coward!" she exclaimed, as he approached.

He was gazing at her in downright bewilderment, when he heard the sound of hurried footsteps: a shadow suddenly rushed from the dense woods; he recognized Madame de Tècle. She ran to the spot, gasping for breath, dishevelled, seized her daughter's hand and turned upon him.

"Let it be both together at least!" she said.



At last he understood. A cry was stifled in his throat. He convulsively grasped his forehead with both hands, then let his arms fall with a despairing gesture.

"So you take me for a murderer!" he said in a hollow voice. "Very good," he added, stamping on the ground in a sudden frenzy, "what are you doing here? —Fly! fly, I say!"

Mad with fear, they obeyed him. They fled; the mother dragged her daughter away at full speed, and he saw them disappear in the darkness.

As for him, he remained there, in that wild spot, taking no heed of the hours as they passed. Sometimes he walked back and forth across the narrow space that separated him from the bridge and the deep pit; sometimes, stopping abruptly, with his eyes fixed on the ground, he seemed as lifeless and inert as the tree-trunk against which he leaned. If there be, as we hope, a divine hand that weighs our sufferings in the scales as a counterpoise to our sins, those hours should be passed to that man's credit.



## VIII

The next morning the Marquise de Campvallon was walking on the shore of a large sheet of water, circular in shape, that adorned the lower part of her park, and whose shimmering surface could be seen through the trees, at some distance. She was making the circuit of the pond at a slow pace, her head bent forward, dragging her long black dress over the gravel, and escorted by two great swans of dazzling whiteness which, evidently expecting some food from her hand, swam along at her side, close to the bank. Suddenly Monsieur de Camors appeared before her. She had thought that she should never see him again; she raised her head and quickly put her hand to her heart.

"Yes, it is I," he said. "Give me your hand."

She did so.

"You were right, Charlotte," he continued; "bonds like ours are not to be broken.—I thought of trying it.—I reproach myself for it as a dastardly thought, for which, by the way, I have been sufficiently punished. Nevertheless I beg you to forgive me."

She gently led him a few steps away, under the shadow of some tall plane-trees that surrounded the pond; she knelt with her theatrical grace, and, fixing her moist eyes upon his face, she covered his hands with kisses. He lifted her up and said in a low voice, pressing her to his heart:

“You did not really intend to commit that crime, did you?”

As she shook her head in a sort of melancholy indecision, he added bitterly:

“However, we should be only the more worthy of each other, for I have been thought capable of it!”

He took her arm, and as they walked he described in a few words the scenes of the preceding night. He told her that he had not returned to his house and that he had determined never to return to it.

Such was in fact the result of his painful meditations. To try to explain matters to those who had so mortally insulted him, to open the depths of his heart to them to tell them that that criminal design of which they accused him had been repelled by him with horror when it was suggested to him by another the night before—he had thought of it; but the humiliation would have been useless, even if he could have made up his mind to stoop to it. How could he hope to overcome by words distrust so great as to be open to such suspicions? He had a confused idea of its source, and he realized that that distrust, embittered by memories of the past, was incur-

able. The certainty that the breach was irreparable, outraged pride and indignation at the injustice done him had left him but one possible refuge—the one to which he had turned.

The Comtesse de Camors and Madame de Tècle learned from their servants and the public, and in no other way, that the count had taken up his quarters in a country house that he had hired, at a short distance from the Château de Campvallou. After writing ten letters, all of which he had burned, he had decided to maintain absolute silence. They trembled for some time lest he should take his son. He thought of it, but it was a sort of revenge that he disdained.

That choice of a place of residence, which publicly advertised his relations with Madame de Campvallou, made a sensation in Parisian society, where it very soon became known; it revived strange rumors there, as may be imagined. Monsieur de Camors knew of them and despised them. His pride, which was at that time smarting under the keenest irritation, took delight in defying public opinion, feeling sure too that it could easily triumph over it. Monsieur de Camors knew that with plenty of audacity and money, there is no situation of affairs which society cannot be made to accept.

From that moment he energetically took up the thread of his life, his habits, his occupations, his thoughts of the future. Madame de Campvallou, to whom he confided all his plans, added her own to them,

and they both devoted themselves to the task of arranging in advance the scheme of their lives, thenceforth inextricably united forever. Camors's personal fortune, added to that of the marchioness, placed no limit to the fanciful projects that might tempt their imaginations. They agreed to live apart in Paris; but the marchioness's salon would belong to them in common: their brilliant personalities would shine there side by side and would make it a social centre of tremendous influence. There the marchioness would reign, by virtue of her splendid beauty, over the world of letters, arts and politics. Camors would find there springs of action which could not fail to hasten the lofty destiny for which his talents and his ambition marked him out. It was in fact the life that they had dreamed of at the beginning of their liaison, as the ideal of human happiness—that of two beings of superior mould proudly sharing, above the heads of the common herd, all earthly pleasures—the intoxication of passion and intellectual enjoyments, the sense of satisfied pride and the excitement of power. The glory of such a life would be Camors's revenge and would cause bitter regret in the hearts of those who had dared to misunderstand him. The short time that had elapsed since the general's death compelled them, however, to postpone the realization of their dream if they did not wish to shock the public conscience too violently. They appreciated it and determined to travel for a few months before going to Paris. The time occupied in

forming their plans for the future and in making preparations for their journey, was the happiest time in Madame de Campvallou's life. She enjoyed at last in its fulness an intimacy which had been so long disturbed, and whose charm was great in very truth; for her lover, as if to make her forget his momentary desertion, lavished upon her the effusions of a passionate affection with the infinite fascinations of his mind. He displayed at the same time in his private studies, as well as in their joint plans, an ardor, a fire that lighted up his brow, shone in his eyes, and seemed to enhance his manly beauty.

It often happened that, after leaving the marchioness, he worked very late at home, sometimes until morning. One night, a short time before the day fixed for their departure, the count's confidential servant, who slept in the room below his master's, heard a noise that alarmed him. He ran upstairs and found Monsieur de Camors lying motionless on the floor beside his study table. The servant, whose name was Daniel, enjoyed his master's full confidence and loved him with the devoted affection that strong natures often inspire in their inferiors. He sent for Madame de Campvallou. She arrived very soon. Monsieur de Camors, who had recovered from his swoon but was still very pale, was walking across his room when she entered. He seemed annoyed to see her and reproved his servant sharply for his ill-advised zeal. He had simply had, he said, one of



the attacks of vertigo to which he was subject. Madame de Campvallon went away almost immediately, after imploring him not to work to such excess.

When he went to the château the next day, she was not surprised at the weakness which his features betrayed, attributing it to the shock he had received in the night ; but when she spoke of their approaching departure she was astonished, yes, alarmed by his reply :

“ Let us put it off a while, I beg you ; I do not feel in any condition to travel.”

The days passed. He made no allusion to the journey. He was gloomy, taciturn, cold. The energetic, feverish ardor that had hitherto animated his life, his speech, his eyes, had suddenly vanished. The symptom that disturbed the marchioness more than all the rest was the absolute idleness into which he relapsed. He left her early in the evening. Daniel told her that he did not work, and that he heard him walking a great part of the night. At the same time his health was visibly failing.

The marchioness determined one day to question him. As they were walking together in the park she began :

“ You are hiding something from me. You are not well, my dear ; what is the matter ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ I beg you to tell me.”

“ Nothing is the matter,” he repeated with more emphasis.

"Do you long for your son?"

"I long for nothing."

After walking a few steps in silence, he suddenly burst forth :

"When I think that there is somebody in this world who called me a coward—for I can always hear that word in my ear!—who called me a coward, and who believes that I am a coward, and who will always believe it!—If it were a man, it would settle itself; but it's a woman!"

After that sudden explosion he held his peace.

"Well, what do you want? what do you ask?" said the marchioness in a sort of frenzy. "Do you want me to go and tell her the truth?—to tell her that you were ready to defend her against me?—that you love her and hate me?—If that's what you want, say so!—I think I should be capable of it, this life is becoming so unbearable!"

"Don't you take your turn at insulting me," he said quickly. "Dismiss me if you please, but I love nobody but you. My pride is bleeding, that is all!—And I give you my word that if you should ever insult me by undertaking to justify me, I would never see you or her again while I live.—Kiss me!"

He pressed her to his heart and she was calmer for some hours.

Meanwhile the house he had hired would soon cease to be at his disposal as the owner was returning to it. It was near the middle of December, at which time the

marchioness was in the habit of returning to Paris. She proposed to Monsieur de Camors to entertain him at the château during the few days they were still to pass in the country. He accepted ; but when she mentioned Paris, he said :

“ Why so soon ? aren’t we comfortable here ? ”

A little later she reminded him that the session of the Chamber was about to begin. He alleged his health, which he knew was failing he said, as a pretext for his wish to resign his seat. By earnest entreaty she induced him to be content with a request for a leave of absence.

“ But I am condemning you to a melancholy sort of existence, my dear,” he said.

“ With you,” she replied, “ I am happy everywhere and under all circumstances.”

It was not true that she was happy ; but it was true that she loved him and was devoted to him. There was no suffering to which she was not resigned, no sacrifice she was not prepared to make, if it were for him. From that moment the prospect of that radiant existence, that social sovereignty of which she had so fondly dreamed and which she thought that she had within her grasp, faded away. She began to have forebodings of a gloomy future of solitude, renunciation and secret tears ; but with him sorrow itself was a festival.

We know how swiftly life passes for those who are buried in some profound grief, with no means of distraction ; the days are long, but their sequence is swift and

almost imperceptible. Thus it was that the months and seasons succeeded one another in the lives of the marchioness and Camors with a monotony that left almost no trace on their minds. Their daily relations were invariable : on the count's part, a cold, often silent courtesy, and on the part of the marchioness watchful care and restrained grief. Every day they rode out together, both dressed in black, arousing sympathy by their beauty and their sadness, and regarded throughout the countryside with respect mingled with terror.

Early in the following year Madame de Campvallon became seriously anxious. Although Monsieur de Camors never complained, it was plain that his health was failing more and more. A dark, almost clayey hue overspread his wasted cheeks and extended even to the whites of his eyes. The marchioness, without consulting him, sent for his physician in Paris. Monsieur de Camors showed some displeasure when he saw him, but submitted to his examination with his usual courtesy. The physician detected symptoms of chronic inflammation of the liver ; he saw no immediate danger, but recommended a season at Vichy, some precautions in the way of diet and absolute repose of mind. When the marchioness tried to suggest a visit to Vichy, Camors shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

A few days later Madame de Campvallon, on going to the stables one morning, found Medjé, Camors's favorite mare, white with foam, panting heavily and half foun-

dered. The groom with some embarrassment explained the beast's condition by saying that the count had been riding that morning. The marchioness thereupon had recourse to Daniel, who had become her confidant. She pressed him with questions and he finally admitted that his master had recently on several occasions, gone out in the saddle in the evening and had not returned until morning. Daniel was in despair over those nocturnal excursions, which, he said, tired Monsieur de Camors terribly. He ended by confessing to Madame de Campvallon that Reuilly was their goal.

The Comtesse de Camors, influenced by considerations which would be without interest to the reader, had continued to live at Reuilly after her husband deserted her. Reuilly was some ten leagues from Campvallon, although the distance could be somewhat shortened by resorting to cross-cuts. Monsieur de Camors did not hesitate to ride that distance twice in one night in order to enjoy the sensation of breathing for a few moments the same air that his wife and child were breathing. Daniel had accompanied him once or twice; but the count generally went alone. He left his horse in the woods, crept as near to the house as he could without running the risk of being discovered, and, skulking like a malefactor in the shadow of the trees, he watched the windows, the lights, noted the sounds, the slightest indications of the presence of those dear ones from whom he was separated by an impassable chasm.

The marchioness, half indignant, half dismayed by an exhibition of eccentricity that seemed to her to border on madness, pretended to know nothing about it; but those two minds were so accustomed to penetrate each other's thoughts from day to day, that they could not conceal anything from each other. He knew that she knew of his weakness and he no longer seemed to care to make a mystery of it.

One day in July he rode out in the afternoon and did not return to dinner. He reached the woods of Reuilly just at nightfall, as his purpose was. He entered the garden with the usual precautions, and, by virtue of his acquaintance with the customs of the household, he was able, without being discovered, to approach the building in which the countess's bedroom, which was also her son's, was situated. On account of the peculiar location of the house, that room was one floor above the courtyard but opened directly into the garden. One of the windows was open because of the warmth of the evening. Monsieur de Camors, concealing himself behind one of the shutters, which was half closed, gazed into the room. He had not seen his wife or his son or Madame de Tècle for nearly two years; he saw them all three. Madame de Tècle was working by the fire-place: her face had not changed, it still wore the same youthful air; but her hair was as white as snow. Madame de Camors was sitting on a couch almost facing the window, undressing her son and

gayly exchanging questions, answers and kisses with him.

At a sign from his mother the child knelt at her feet in his thin night-dress, and while she held his hands in hers he began to say his evening prayer aloud. From time to time she whispered a word that her husband could not hear. The prayer, which consisted of a number of short sentences within the comprehension of his childish mind, ended with these words: "God, be kind and merciful to my mother, my grandmother and everybody I love, and 'specially, God, to my poor father!" He uttered the words with childish rapidity; but at a serious glance from his mother, he at once repeated with touching insistence, like a child trying to master an inflection that has been taught him: "and 'specially, God, to my poor father!"

Monsieur de Camors turned sharply, walked noiselessly away, and left the garden by the nearest exit. He passed the night in the woods. A single fixed idea took possession of him: he was determined to see his child, to speak to him, to kiss him, to press him to his heart. What might come after mattered little to him. He remembered that they were in the habit of taking the child to the nearest farm every morning for a cup of milk. He hoped that they still continued the practice.

The morning came and ere long the hour that he was awaiting. He had hidden in the path leading to the farm. He heard the sound of footsteps, joyous shouts



and laughter, and his son suddenly appeared, running toward him. He was then a handsome little fellow of five or six years, graceful and manly. When he saw Monsieur de Camors in the middle of the path, he paused : he hesitated at sight of that unknown or half-forgotten face ; but Camors's affectionate, almost supplicating smile reassured him.

"Monsieur?" he said in an uncertain tone.

Camors opened his arms, stooping as if he were about to kneel.

"Come and kiss me, I beg you!" he murmured.

The child was walking up to him with a smile when the maid who accompanied him and who was his former nurse, suddenly made her appearance.

She threw up her hands in dismay.

"Your father!" she exclaimed in a stifled voice.

At the word the child uttered a terrified shriek, ran swiftly back and clung to the woman's skirts, fastening his frightened eyes upon his father. The nurse took him by the arm and hastily led him away.

Monsieur de Camors did not weep. The corners of his mouth contracted in a ghastly way and emphasized the thinness of his cheeks. He shivered violently two or three times as in an attack of fever. He passed his hand slowly across his forehead, drew a long breath and went away.

Madame de Campvallon did not know of that sad scene ; but she saw its results and felt them bitterly her

self. Monsieur de Camors's disposition, which had already changed so radically, became unrecognizable. He no longer treated her even with the frigid courtesy he had observed hitherto. He manifested a strange antipathy to her. He avoided her. She noticed that he avoided touching her hand. They met more infrequently than ever, Camors's health no longer permitting him to take his meals at stated hours.

Those two desolate lives presented a pitiable spectacle amid the almost regal magnificence of their surroundings. Through that superb park, among the beautiful beds of flowers and the great marble urns, under the long arches of verdure, peopled with white statues, they wandered separately, like two mournful ghosts, meeting now and then, but never speaking to each other.

One day, toward the end of September, Monsieur de Camors did not leave his room. Daniel told the marchioness that he had given orders that no one was to be admitted.

"Not even I?" she said.

He shook his head sorrowfully. She persisted.

"I should be discharged, madame," he said.

As the count persisted in his mania for absolute seclusion, she was reduced thenceforth to such information as the servant could give her each day. Monsieur de Camors had not taken to his bed. He passed his time in gloomy reverie, lying on a couch. He rose from time to time, wrote a few lines, then lay down again. He

seemed to be terribly weak, although he did not complain of any pain. After two or three weeks the marchioness, reading upon Daniel's features signs of greater anxiety than usual, begged him to admit the physician, whom she summoned to his master's presence. He decided to do it. The unhappy creature, when the doctor had entered the count's room, stood close against the door, listening in an agony of apprehension. She thought that she heard Camors's voice raised in anger, then the sounds died away. The doctor, when he came out, said to her simply :

"His condition seems to me to be serious, but not desperate, madame. I thought it best not to press him too far to-day ; he has agreed to see me again to-morrow."

During the night, about two o'clock, Madame de Campvallon heard some one calling her ; she recognized Daniel's voice. She rose at once, wrapped herself in a cloak and admitted him.

"Monsieur le comte is asking for you, madame," he said ; and he burst into tears.

"My God, what has happened?"

"Come, madame, you must hurry."

She followed him without more words.

As soon as she stepped into the room, she realized the situation at a glance. Death was at hand. Exhausted by pain, that strong, proud, powerful life was nearing its end. Camors's head, thrown back upon the pillow, seemed to be already motionless in death. His

noble features, more sharply outlined by suffering, had assumed the rigid immobility of sculptured marble. His eye alone was still alive and watchful. The marchioness walked hastily to his side and tried to take the hand that was wandering over the sheet. He drew it away. She uttered a despairing exclamation. He gazed fixedly at her. She thought that she could see that he was trying to speak and could not; but his eyes spoke. They were making some request, imperative and supplicating at once, which she evidently understood, for she said aloud, in a tone overflowing with grief and affection:

“I promise!”

He seemed to make a painful effort, and his eyes rested on a large sealed letter that lay on the bed; she took it and read on the envelope: “For my son.”

“I promise!” she repeated, as she fell upon her knees and deluged the sheet with her tears.

Then he raised his hand and held it out to her.

“Thanks!” she said.

Her tears flowed with renewed violence as she put her lips to that hand already cold. When she raised her head she saw Monsieur de Camors’s eyes at the same instant become moist, suddenly roll wildly from side to side, and lose their light. She cried out, threw herself on the bed and madly kissed those wide-open eyes, which no longer saw her.

So died that man, who was doubtless a great sinner, but who was still a man.

## NOTES

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1. Page 48.—*Bousingots*. Literally, hats worn by sailors: figuratively, a name applied, after the Revolution of July, 1830, to young men who affected carelessness in their dress, and manifested democratic leanings.

2. Page 205.—*Chair à canon*. Literally, flesh for cannon; troops that are recklessly exposed to the enemy's fire.





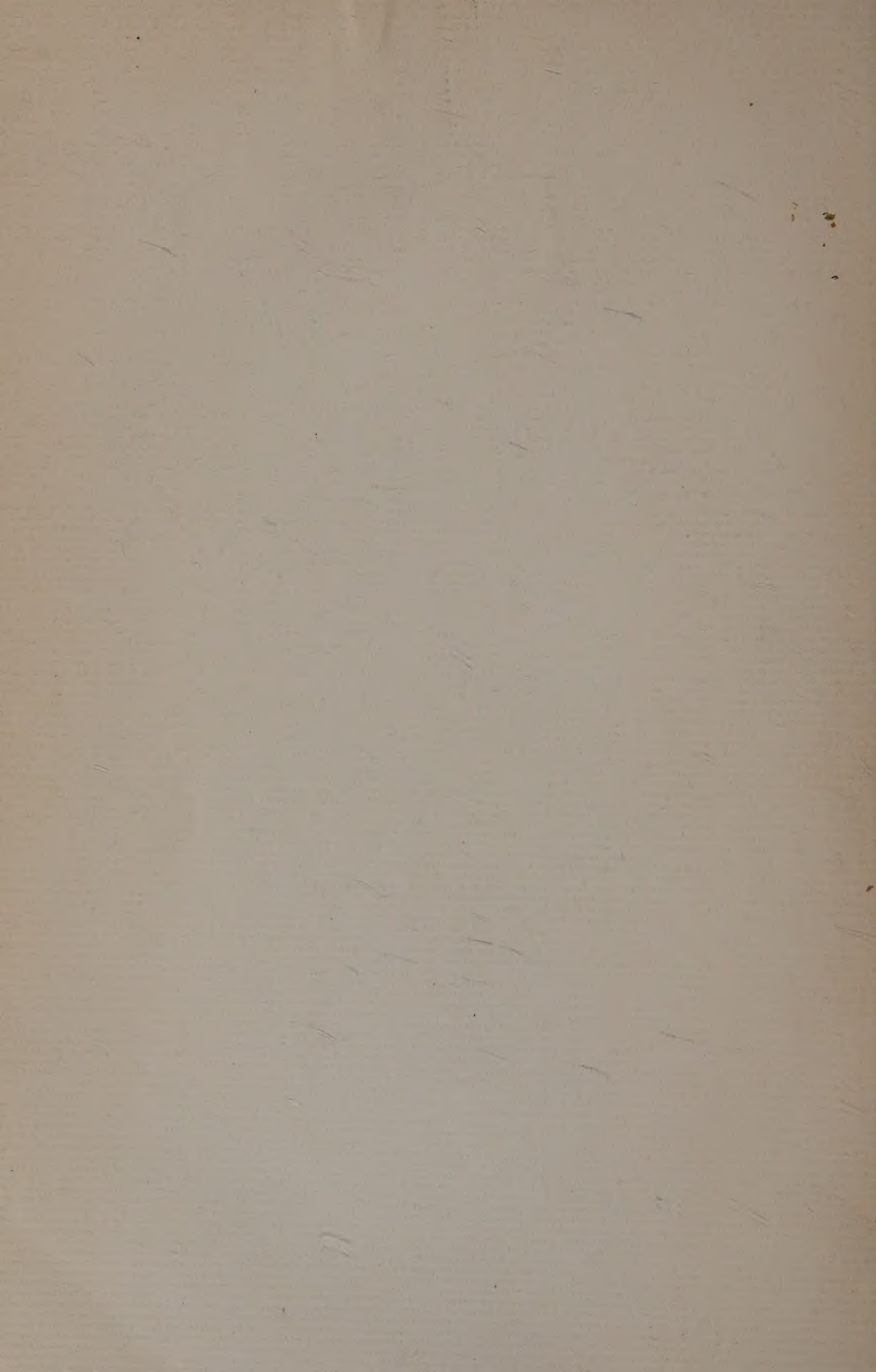












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